

**BAPTISM AS CHRISTIAN INITIATION:
THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF BEING
UNITED WITH CHRIST**

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by
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ABSTRACT

BAPTISM AS CHRISTIAN INITIATION: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF BEING UNITED WITH CHRIST

By Sukkil Yoon

Baptism as a ritual is not the creation of Jesus, but is introduced by John the Baptist. John's baptism originated in Judaism and his baptism preserved the function and implication of Jewish washing, i.e., ritual cleansing from impurity, by means of repentance and forgiveness. Baptism as initiation, however, is not found in the Hebrew Bible, whose initiation was circumcision.

Other than Judaism, the mystery religions were mostly influential in the New Testament era. Of all things, the myth of the god who died and rose again was widespread in the mystery religions which were under Hellenistic influence, and this myth was an important feature of the mystery religions. Paul, a prominent Gentile missionary in the Greco-Roman world, understood salvation in terms of a participation in the fate of Christ. Paul and following Christian writers utilized the Hellenistic ideas and languages from the gentile cults and literature when spreading the gospel which is basically the "mystery of Christ." For Paul, baptism is not merely an immersion asking forgiveness, but the union with Christ who died and was resurrected. It may confirm that Christian baptism was developed out of Greco-Roman tradition in the earlier Christianity.

That Jesus was baptized by John must have been a problem from the beginning of Christianity; it raised serious questions about Jesus' sin and his subordination to John.

The practice of baptism, or its meaning for the early Churches, does not occur in a simple way, because implied Christology in each Gospel is not identical.

Christian baptism is a baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. This change of significance shows how the practice and interpretation of baptism had been transformed even within the New Testament writings. In a religiously pluralistic world, the true meaning of baptism should be reinterpreted for the contemporary Church that suffers from division and alienation, because baptism signifies union. For the discussion about the subject of Christian union, recent ecumenical communion ecclesiology which is based upon the sacramental theology will be employed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Baptism can be defined as the “rite of entrance into a community of faith.”¹ In ancient times, initiates participated in a rite of passage by which they were separated from their previous state of existence, and were incorporated into a new state of reality.² In this way, initiation included a negation of the old reality with its peculiar boundaries.³ Initiation rituals in ancient worlds were not simply symbolic acts conveying information, or mere reenactments of sacred life. Rather, the rite itself was thought to effect the transition from the old state to the new.⁴ Initiation, therefore, should be understood as part of a process of transformation in a particular religious group. Likewise, Christian initiation, baptism, was understood and practiced in the earlier Church with similar

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture*, translated by Willard Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), xii-xiv, 19-20. See also A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background*, WUNT 44 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 380-81.

² Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 88-89.

³ Meeks, 102, 107.

⁴ Wedderburn, 369; Meeks, 142.

functions and significances, though Christian baptism preserved some unparalleled elements in itself.

A primary goal of this dissertation is to investigate how the rite of Christian initiation, e.g. baptism, was introduced by John the Baptist, and performed and understood by the early Churches. To examine the origin, significance, and background for New Testament baptism, an investigation will include Jewish writings (Hebrew Bible, LXX, Apocrypha, and Rabbinic literature), Greco-Roman sources, New Testament writings, and other Christian literature that deals with the subject.

The main thesis of the dissertation is twofold. First, the Christian initiation rite was closely related to Jewish traditions in an earlier stage and this kind of baptism was performed by John the Baptist and found mainly in the Gospels and the literary work of Josephus. One of the functions of Jewish immersion was to express repentance and purification, in symbolizing cleansing from sin. John's baptism preserves the function and implication of Jewish washing, i.e., cleansing from sin by means of repentance and forgiveness. Second, the practice and meaning of baptism, however, underwent significant changes and were continually reinterpreted in totally different religious environments which gentile missionaries confronted. For example, in Paul's understanding, baptism is not merely an immersion asking for forgiveness but the union with Christ who died and resurrected, so Christian baptism is a baptism into the death and the resurrection of Christ. Pauline theology of baptism, preserved in Rom 6:1-11, Gal 3:27-28, and 1 Cor 12:12-13, where Paul discusses the subject using the idea of union with the dying and rising Christ, is very important for this dissertation.

The following are the major issues that will be critically discussed, each developed in a chapter. The introductory chapter includes an overview of the study, a linguistic survey, and the debate whether baptism was an initiation or not in the New Testament. The second and third chapters show an interest in the theories regarding the backgrounds of John's baptism and origins of Christian baptism. The subject of baptism is first introduced in the New Testament through the Baptist. John's baptism plays an especially important role in beginning the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth; John's proclamation and Christology is hence not to be neglected when studying the origin of Christianity. John's baptism, typically practiced by full immersion in the Jordan River, is defined by certain Christian groups as "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The baptism with this understanding is summarized in Mark 1:4 and Acts 2:38. This concept of a baptism of repentance, and for the forgiveness of sins later becomes an central element of Christian baptism. Christian baptism somehow was based upon the baptism of John the Baptist. Therefore, it can be said that there was indeed an unbroken continuity from the baptism of John to the baptism practiced by the early Christians.

In order to examine this complicated issue, two different approaches will be employed: the background of John the Baptist's baptism and the origin of Christian baptism. The two different approaches presuppose that the baptism of John could be the prototype for that of early Christianity but not identical with it in many crucial points. According to the New Testament, baptism as an external act is not created by Jesus, even though the Fourth Gospel states three times that Jesus did baptize (3:22, 26; 4:1); these statements are immediately corrected by the affirmation that it was his disciples, not

Jesus, who baptized (4:2). Rather, it has been claimed that the Christian ritual of baptism has in some way developed out of Judaism in an early stage of Christianity. On the one hand, John the Baptist as a Jewish prophet and Jesus Christ lived and ministered within the milieu of Judaism, so one may assume that the baptisms of John and of Christianity had their prototype within Judaism. While there is no explicit reference to baptism in the Old Testament, as we understand it in the Christian sense, there are implicit references in Jewish literature to various elements that eventually asserted themselves in Christian baptism, such as the use of water for ceremonial purification, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on individuals, and possibly circumcision (Col. 2:11-12) as a sign of entry to a new faith community. There are three main types of Jewish tradition that have been considered as possible background for the practice and implication of the baptism of John the Baptist: Levitical ablution, Jewish proselyte baptism, and Qumran purification rite.

It is undeniable that the most obviously ancestral faith for Christianity was Judaism and the earliest Christians were Jews, and that Christian forms of worship owed something to the Jewish sects. The problem, however, is that John's baptism and Jewish washing rituals are not identical with the rituals of Christianity in several points, in particular, Paul's interpretation of baptism. So, we need other sources to examine this issue. As many scholars have suggested, other than Judaism the mystery religions were mostly influential before and after Jesus. Of all things, the myth of the god who dies and rises again was widespread in the mystery religions, which were under Hellenistic influence; this myth was an important feature of the mystery religions. The gods or goddesses who were believed to die and rise again were Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and

Dionysus. Scholars have described with varying interpretations the links between the rituals in mystery religions and those of Christianity, during its first centuries. How the Christians' new way of interpreting the baptism, as found in Pauline Letters, is related to the other religious tradition is one of the main concerns in this research. It has been claimed that the Hellenistic Church understood baptism analogous to the initiation sacraments of the mystery religions. Christian writers have used the Hellenistic ideas and language from the cults and literature in order to express Christian belief within the environment toward which they attempt to introduce the gospel which is basically the mystery of Christ. While they adopt certain terms, concepts, and forms of speech, they sometimes altered and modified the religious conceptions in terms of their own theological criteria. For Gentile Christians, it would not be difficult to understand a baptism as being incorporated into the body of Christ and having some form of union with Christ. These notions must be compared with initiation rituals as we find them in many mystery religions in the Greco-Roman world.

All the Evangelists have the narrative about the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, but the presentation is not identical and thus creates many critical questions for the exegetes. In regard to baptism there are several issues to be discussed. Whether Jesus was required to be baptized "for forgiveness of sin" is one of the main problems of the early Church and, hence, becomes a critical issue of the dissertation. That Jesus was baptized by John must have been a problem from the beginning of Christianity, because this indicates that Jesus might have been subordinate to John and that Jesus had something negative in his life that should be wiped out before the baptism. When we

carefully examine the New Testament sources, we are informed that the practice of baptism, or its meaning for the early Churches, did not occur in a simplistic way. The next concern accordingly falls on how Jesus' baptism was appropriated by each Evangelist, each presenting a different Christology in the Gospels. First of all, Mark includes the reference to John's baptism as one aimed at repentance and the remission of sins (Mk 1:4). It may claim that Mark shows the least embarrassment concerning the matter of whether Jesus had sin to repent or not. Matthew avoids the Markan picture and instead introduces an apologia for Jesus' behavior (Mt 3:14-15). Matthew has John the Baptist describe his baptism in distinctive terms: "Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν" ("I baptize you in water for repentance," Mt 3:11). Significant for the Matthean Baptist, baptism was still a means to repentance, but not forgiveness. According to the Matthean tradition, it is the blood of Jesus, not John's baptism, which forgives sins (Mt 26:28). Luke, meanwhile, places the Spirit at the center of the scene, and so relegates the actual baptism of Jesus by John to a subordinate clause (Lk 3:21-22). For Luke, though Jesus was baptized with many people (3:21), Jesus' baptism is different from that of all the people and this is proved by the unusual things happened in Jesus' baptism: the heaven opened and the Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove. In Acts, assumed in consent by scholars as the second book of Luke, Christian initiation becomes "an integral rite that involves water and the gift of the Holy Spirit."⁵ The Fourth Gospel

⁵ Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 39. According to them, in Luke's understanding the Spirit was not mediated through John's baptism, but later the Spirit became necessary which accompanied with the water baptism.

does not mention of the actual event of Jesus' baptism and instead inserts John's confessional exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus died on the day of Preparation (Jn 19:31) as the lamb of Passover, while in the Synoptics Jesus ate Passover meal (Mk 14:12-16 and parallel). It is striking that in the Fourth Gospel, John, who is known in the Christian tradition as the Baptist, is not called the Baptist but always simply John. Though John is baptizing (1:28, 31; 3:23; 10:42), the title ὁ βαπτίζων is claimed for Jesus (1:33). Furthermore, John the Baptist is not the forerunner of Jesus, simply because Jesus is pre-existent. In the Johannine Christology, baptism is definitely unnecessary for Jesus "who comes from above" (3:31). Rather, Jesus is a baptizer. That Jesus baptized, however, is corrected probably because it does not satisfy John's prophetic announcement that "The Coming One will baptize with Holy Spirit" (1:33), not with water. The fourth Gospel should be read from the perspective of "incarnation Christology." One might acknowledge that neither the practice of baptism, nor its interpretation was uniform in the Gospels.

In the following chapter, by paying attention to the various interpretations of Romans 6:1-11, as well as Galatians 3:26-28 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, to what extent Paul was related to the mystery religions, as far as the rite of baptism is concerned, will be discussed. Paul may have taken over some of his views on baptism from the primitive Church, but he has certainly presented a new teaching of baptism, expressed in a distinctive way. One of the most distinctive features in the Pauline theology of baptism is that he understands salvation in terms of a participation in the fate of Christ, as did the mystery religions. Paul is using the images of "being baptized into Christ's death" (Rom

6:3) or “being buried by baptism with Christ in death” (Rom 6:4), which can also be found in all the mystery religions, most clearly in the Phrygian baptism in blood. In Romans 6, the term ὁμοιώμα in baptismal rite needs a careful examination, usually referring to the appearance and presence in a cultic symbol of the divine salvation, more precisely of the Christ event itself. Therefore baptism is characterized as ὁμοιώμα τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ (Rom. 6:5), because the initiates experience a mystical death through the baptism, similar to the death of Christ on the cross. This way of interpretation of baptism is, however, neither made by any Jewish baptist group, including John the Baptist, nor any Evangelist.

The following chapter is an attempt to understand how the early Churches adapted and modified the implication and the practice of baptism. It appears that from early times it became the usual custom to initiate new converts into the Church through a process that included baptism. Though some Christian Gnostic documents denigrate not only the baptismal rite but also John the Baptist,⁶ several documents written or edited in the later New Testament era show a baptismal rite to be essential for entry into the Christian Church (1 Pet.; Tit; Mk 16:16; Mt 28:19b). Also, there is a striking continuity between John’s baptism and the baptism to which Peter invited the Jews assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2), but the discontinuity is as great as the continuity in the case of the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline Letters. Therefore, primitive Christian baptism can be understood as a christianized Johannine baptism. In later traditions, the metaphor of birth

⁶ For examples, *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, 144 and *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 63.

or rebirth appears (Tit 3:5-7, etc.), as well as that of enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 1 Pet 2:9). Though Jesus himself may not have been interested in exercising baptism as part of his ministry, at least in the Synoptic Gospels, Christians reappropriated it as a ritual means by which to link themselves to the life and work of Jesus Christ.

The following chapter focuses on the contemporary theology that deals with baptism as sacrament within an ecclesial context. Several issues, such as the relationship between baptism as sacrament and the Church, the role of baptism in relation to Ecclesiology, and the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism and Christian life, will be discussed. The discussion is set within the context of a contemporary ecumenical trend.

I hope to show in the dissertation that the procedure and the interpretation of baptism underwent significant changes in the new Christian contexts and that the changes happened in various ways in different places. The Pauline letters enable us to recognize the transformation of baptism. Romans 6:1-11, for example, is using the idea of union with the dying and rising Christ, in order to figure out baptism, while John's baptism preserves the function and implication of Jewish washing, i.e., ritual cleansing from sin, by means of repentance and forgiveness. In Paul's understanding, baptism is not merely an immersion asking forgiveness but the union with Christ who died and resurrected, so the Christian baptism is a baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. This shows how the practice and interpretation of baptism had been developed even within the New Testament writings. The variation in baptismal doctrine is, hence, a response to new contexts; it calls to the Church for continual change. We remember that for a long time in Church history the controversy of baptism ironically has created lots of divisions in the

one and universal Church, though baptism accentuates a union. Just as the early Churches did, we who live in a religiously pluralistic world should try to reinterpret the true meaning of baptism and reapply it into the contemporary Church, for the Church's role must not merely be limited to the issue of human salvation. That is why communion understanding from the perspective of Trinitarian dimension becomes important in recent Ecclesiology.

In summary, this dissertation is going to deal with the following critical issues: 1) Was Jesus required to be baptized for forgiveness of sins? In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was baptized and it is said that the baptism is for the forgiveness of sin. 2) What were the backgrounds for John's baptism and the origins for the Christian baptism? 3) How was Jesus' baptism by John interpreted and signified in each Gospel? 4) How were Paul and his audiences related to the mystery religions in understanding the rite of initiation? 5) How did the early Churches adapt and modify the implication and the practice of baptism? Finally, 6) How can the subject of baptism be discussed in contemporary theology, especially when division and alienation plague both Church and world?

Linguistic Survey of Baptism-related Words

If we want to discover what the biblical writers meant by baptism, we must learn first how the word was used when they wrote the New Testament. Unlike today when the verb "to baptize" is primarily used in religious settings in which it can be defined "dip," "immerse," "wash," or "dip oneself" (mid.), in the time of Jesus this word was also used

in non-religious contexts in either a literal or a figurative manner to mean “immerse, ... plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm, etc.”⁷ For example, in ancient Greek documents, one can find that “to baptize” was used to describe a boat that had sunk as well as a person who was overwhelmed with problems.⁸

In the LXX, βάπτω usually translates the Hebrew טָבַל (“dip,” 13 times). The term βαπτίζω occurs only 4 times: in Isaiah 21:4 it is used metaphorically of destruction (בַּעֲתָ, literary “overwhelm”), but in 2 Kings 5:14 it is used in the middle of Naaman’s sevenfold immersion in the Jordan (the only passages as equivalent for Hebrew טָבַל), in which there is no suggestion of Naaman’s destruction. The use of βαπτίζω in the story of Naaman may have been decisive for its later use to signify taking a ritual bath for cleansing.⁹ The verb has this meaning also in Sirach 34 (31):25 (purification after touching a corpse); Judith 12:7 (purification). It seems that βαπτίζω, both in Jewish and Christian contexts, normally meant “to immerse,” and that even when it became a technical term for baptism, the thought of immersion remained. The metaphorical uses of the term in the New Testament appear to take this for granted, e.g. the prophecy that the Messiah will baptize

⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., trans. and rev. by William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker (Chicago: University of London Press, 1979), 131.

⁸ “βαπτίζω,” in *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, edited by James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 102.

⁹ Joseph Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology* (Nijmegen: Dekker and Van de Vegt, 1962), 27-28.

in Spirit and fire as a liquid (Mt 3:11), the baptism of the Israelites in the cloud and the sea (I Cor 10:2), and in the idea of Jesus' death as a baptism (Mk 10:38). It is commonly said that baptism as an initiatory rite is not found in the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha, though ritual cleansing by immersion is present.

In the New Testament βάπτω occurs only 4 times (twice in Jn 13:26; Lk 16:24; Rev. 19:13), and only with the meaning "to dip." The word βαπτίζω is a technical term for baptism, though not always,¹⁰ and in all the Gospels it occurs chiefly in the account of John's baptism, in particular that of Jesus. In Acts βαπτίζω is almost always used of Christian baptism (18 out of 21 passages; 3 refers to John's baptism). It is only in the Synoptics that John is described as the βαπτιστής (used as a noun, 7 times in Matthew, twice in Mark, 3 times in Luke). On the other hand, the noun βάπτισμα is mainly used in Christian literature, where it refers to the baptism of John or to Christian baptism. The word βαπτισμός is used in a wider sense for "dipping," "washing" (of dishes in Mk 7:4), or "ritual washings" (Heb 9:10; John's baptism in Josephus, *Ant.* 18,117; Christian baptism in Col 2:12). In this case the usage and the meaning of the term is very similar to that of καθαρισμός in Jn 2:6. The idea is of plunging an object into water. Although none of the Christian baptism recorded in New Testament clearly describe how it was

¹⁰ For example, Mark 7:4 uses the same Greek word βαπτίζω when referring to the washing practice of the Pharisees: "they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it" (NRSV). It seems unlikely that the Pharisees immersed their entire bodies in water before eating, every time they passed through the marketplace. It is more likely that this practice is a symbolic, ceremonial washing, probably involving just the hands. This is also likely the case in Lk 11:38 where the Pharisees disapproved of Jesus for not washing himself before dinner (ὅτι οὐ πρῶτον ἐβαπτίσθη πρὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου). The word baptism was not seen as synonymous with immersion at the time the New Testament was written.

performed, there is a certain example that specifically states that both the person being baptized and the baptizer “went into the water” (Ac. 8:38-39).¹¹ However, the mode of baptism can in no way be determined from the Greek word rendered “baptize,” because it means both to dip a thing into an element or liquid, and to put an element or liquid over or on it. One may admit that the word was used with a variety of meaning and practice.

Was Baptism an Initiation in the New Testament?

In the life and self-understanding of ancient religions, an initiation rite was a standard element or pattern. Because of this, it was commonplace to view the existential change wrought by the initiation rite as a death to one’s former existence or status and as a new birth or rebirth into a superior existence or status.¹² The initiates participated in a rite of passage by which they were separated from their previous state of existence, and were incorporated into a new state of reality.¹³ In this way, initiation included a negation of the old reality with its peculiar boundaries.¹⁴

¹¹ “He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him” (Acts 8:38: NRSV).

¹² Eliade, xii-xiv, 19-20. See also Wedderburn, 380-81.

¹³ Meeks, 88-89.

¹⁴ Meeks, 102, 107.

One may wonder if the baptisms of John and Jesus (in the Fourth Gospel) were the initiation ceremony. Some scholars claim that baptism was not an initiation in terms of which Jesus was not initiated into any group after he was baptized. They insist that people baptized by John the Baptist were not initiated into any community, as well. The only command of Jesus about baptism which is described in Mt 28:18-20 has regarded by New Testament scholarship as unauthentic, a product of second generation Christianity.¹⁵ Also, the Gospels agree that baptism was introduced by John the Baptist as a means of repentance before the terrifying arrival of divine anger and harvest (Mt 3:7-12; Lk 3:7-18). To baptize people is not to initiate them into the Christian community but to cleanse them ritually. They maintain that all the baptisms in Acts do not refer to initiation but emphasize “the relation between the baptized and the baptizer.”¹⁶ These evidences lead

¹⁵ Critical opinions have been offered over against the authenticity of the so-called dominical commission in Matthew. The arguments run as follow. First, the tradition is found only in Matthew and no authentic strand of Gospel teaching contains a command to baptize. The claim is supported by textual criticism; the earlier text contained no mention of baptism. Second, the use of the Trinitarian formula is late; Paul and Acts present baptism as administered “in the name of the Lord Jesus” alone. Third, it would be hard to assume that the commission of the Resurrected Christ to preach the gospel to all nations was neglected by, or unimportant to, the eleven apostles remaining. The passion or attitude to the gentile mission can not easily be found in the Jewish Church; rather, the mission is performed by Paul, who was not the apostolic leader in Jerusalem in the earliest Church. Finally, the idea of gentile mission is not reconciled even in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew, Jesus gives instruction to the disciples when sending out the disciples: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans” (Mt 10:5b). In Mt 15:24, Jesus says: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Moreover, Jesus teaches his disciples, saying “Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” (Mt 10:23). For these reasons, the passage has been interpreted as Matthew’s formulation of what he supposed was now the intention of Jesus.

¹⁶ Kenneth Grayston, “Is Baptism Initiation?” *Epworth Review* 27 (2000): 41. In

them to draw a conclusion: it is the Lord's Supper, not baptism, that functions as initiation in the New Testament.

That baptism was not an initiation has, however, been acutely criticized. The Johannine assertion that Jesus did not baptize but his disciples did should not be taken to suggest that baptism was an activity resulted from the disciples' decision alone, because it is doubtful that they acted against their Lord's will. If John's report that Jesus' disciples baptized is reliable, the disciples should have baptized on Jesus' behalf, and thus added to the community of disciples. The assertion that it is the Lord's Supper rather than baptism that initiates people into the Christian community is theologically and biblically unacceptable. The Eucharist is the sacrament that the Christian community celebrates and this celebration has been made whenever they gather together to worship. If the Eucharist is an initiation, how many times should a Christian be initiated? Moreover, one of the earliest written evidences about Christian baptism is in 1 Corinthians 12:13 where Paul discusses the Church as the body of Christ: "In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." For Paul, to be incorporated into Christ is to be incorporated in the Church. In this statement baptism is implied. Likewise, the comments that "there were added that day about three thousands souls" (Act 2:38-42) would not refer only to a

Grayston's explanation, after baptism the baptized becomes a member of the baptizer's company: Simon believed and stayed in Philip's company (8:13); the Samaritans needed the company of Peter (8:14-17); the Ethiopian eunuch needed Philip while traveling (8:39); Ananias was responsible for Paul (9:17-19); when Paul baptized Lydia, he was asked to stay at her house (16:15); the Philippian jailer, baptized with his whole family, brought Paul and Silas into his house to rejoice in his new faith in God (16:34). So then, to baptize someone includes taking care of him or her.

heavenly register of the saved, but to the growth of the Christian community. An explicit aspect of baptism here is initiation into the community of the disciples of Christ.

In summary, early onward Christian baptism developed connotations of an initiation ritual, initiation into the community of those who accepted Jesus as their Lord whom God raised from the dead. The function of initiation is implicit in some of Paul's remarks on baptism. In 1 Cor 12:12-13, baptism is the means by which Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people are joined into one body. In Rom 6:1-11, baptism implies a dying and rising with Christ through the resurrection, and this kind of expression is seen in the initiatory ceremony in many religions in that period. From its earliest days the Church has believed that baptism was a sacrament commanded by Christ as the divinely appointed means of initiation into the Christian community.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES FOR THE BACKGROUNDS OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

Without a doubt, the most obviously ancestral faith for Christianity was Judaism. The earliest Christians were Jews. They combined participation in Temple worship with Christian services, circumcision with baptism, and keeping the Sabbath as well as the Lord's Day.¹ Early Christians also observed Jewish feasts, Passover for example, with other Jews (Rom 14:5-6a; Col 2:16-17). It is undeniable that Christian forms of worship owed something to Jewish traditions.²

Before the coming of Christ, baptism had been established as the consummating step of the process by which a proselyte would enter the Jewish faith. The people of the New Testament era were therefore quite familiar with the practice. When the priests and Levites confronted John the Baptist, they did not ask him "What are you doing?" but rather they asked him "Why do you baptize?" (Jn. 1:19). When a man from outside confessed a faith in Judaism, he would be instructed in the faith, circumcised, and then he would immerse himself in water in a witnessed ceremony. Immediately as he came out of the water, he would be given all the rights and privileges of Judaism. Since

¹ On the issue of how controversial in keeping the Jewish traditional feasts and Christian Lord's day in the early churches, see Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 3.27.5.

² See John St. John, "The Sacred Meal: The Roots of Christian Ritual," *Dialogue and Alliance* 6/3 (1992): 52-54.

Christianity began within a Jewish environment, the process by which a Gentile would become a Christian followed this procedure precisely except that circumcision was no longer required (Acts 15:19). This change tended to erase any distinction between male and female, making it clear right at the time of a candidate's initiation that Christianity completely removes the three traditional barriers between people that are enumerated in Pauline Letters. Galatians 3:28, believed by many scholars to be a quotation of a baptismal formula in the early Church, reads: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Therefore, functionally, baptism is simply the rite of initiation of an individual into the community of faith. Just as with its Jewish antecedent, it must be voluntary, and it must be witnessed. It may be administered only after a confession of faith and instruction, that is catechism.

With regard to the historical backgrounds of New Testament baptism there are various theories. First of all, it has been thought that the Christian ritual of baptism has in some way developed out of Judaism. John the Baptist, a Jewish prophet, and Jesus lived and ministered within the milieu of Judaism, so it is not wrong to say that the baptism of John and Christianity had its prototype within Judaism. There is, however, no explicit reference in the Old Testament to baptism. Only some commentaries point out that baptism was practiced during the end of the intertestamental period by Jews initiating Gentile converts into Judaism. While there is no explicit reference to baptism in the Old Testament it is understood in the Christian sense, there are references to various elements that will eventually assert themselves in Christian baptism, such as the use of water for ceremonial purification, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on individuals, and possibly

circumcision (Col 2:11-12) as a sign of reentry to a new faith community. One should, however, not assume that only one Jewish form of baptism was practiced at the time of early Christianity. In the Jewish tradition, three rituals could be considered: Levitical ablution, proselyte baptism, and Qumran purification rite.

Levitical Ablution

Ablution or washing was practiced in several ways in the Hebrew Bible. Ablution was an act of purification from impurity or uncleanness.³ In Jewish tradition, most things and persons are basically clean, while some things are permanently unclean, like such animals in the eleventh chapter of Leviticus.⁴ To be restored from the state of uncleanness to the state of cleanness requires some process of cleansing. This process may include a waiting period until evening or a number of days, a cleansing agent such as water (Lev 15; Num 19), blood (Lev 14:5-7), or fire (Num 31:23), and a sacrifice to make atonement before Yahweh because of the person's uncleanness (Lev 14-15).⁵ Objects may be sprinkled or washed in two situations.⁶ The first concerns an object that has been

³ Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, SJLA 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 1.

⁴ Permanently unclean animals cannot be cleansed, rather they are simply not to be eaten. This is cited from Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSS 62 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 96, n. 4.

⁵ Webb, 96.

⁶ An example is found in Num 19:18, where the tent and furnishing which have

defiled by contact with something or someone unclean. In Leviticus 15, for example, persons with a discharge and women who are menstruating render clothing, vessels and other objects unclean. Another situation is the washing of the legs and entrails of the sacrificial animal for the burnt offering (Lev 1).⁷ As a whole, the main reason for washing the object was to cleanse it from uncleanness.

Sprinkling persons with water is used in two contexts: cleansing the Levites prior to service (Num 8:7) and cleansing an impure corpse through the red heifer rite (Num 19:18). When a person was initiated into a higher stage, for example, when Aaron and his sons were set apart to the priest's office, they were washed with water previous to their investiture with the priestly robes (Lev 8:6). Before the priests approached the altar of God, they were also required, on pain of death, to wash their hands and their feet to cleanse them from the soil of common life (Ex 30:17-21). Psalms 26:6 alludes to this practice. Also, there were washings prescribed for the purpose of cleansing from positive defilement contracted by particular acts. Of such washings eleven different species are prescribed in the Levitical law (Lev 12-15). In addition, ablution was practiced when a person purified or absolved himself from the guilt of some particular acts. For example, the elders of the nearest village where some murder was committed were required, when the murderer was unknown, to wash their hands over the expiatory heifer which was beheaded, and in doing so to say, "Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it" (Deut 21:1-9). Similarly, Pilate declared himself innocent of the blood of

had contact with a dead body must be sprinkled in order to be clean.

⁷ Webb, 98.

Jesus by washing his hands (Mt 27:24), though it is not clear whether or not this act of Pilate was borrowed from the custom of the Jews.

In the Second Temple period the ablution was also associated with priestly duties in the temple.⁸ Bathing was used in several cases. Priests bathed prior to beginning their daily ministry in the temple,⁹ as did the common people prior to entering the temple.¹⁰ Furthermore, bathing was practiced with respect to cleansing from leprosy and after sexual intercourse,¹¹ nocturnal emissions,¹² and corpse uncleanness.¹³ Also, an act of handwashing was mentioned as an ablution practiced in conjunction with prayer.¹⁴ In *Sibylline Oracles* 3:591-93, the Jews are praised as those who lift up their holy arms to heaven at dawn, always cleansing their body with water. Another reference to Jewish ablution is found in the New Testament in which Jewish authorities practiced handwashing before eating.¹⁵ It shows that the Torah regulations concerning ablutions

⁸ *Jub.* 21:16; *T. Levi* 9:11; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.87.

⁹ *T. Levi.* 9:11; *Jub* 21:16; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.227.

¹⁰ Philo, *Special Laws* 1.269; *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840. 2.

¹¹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.263.

¹² Philo, *Spec.* 1.119.

¹³ *Sir* 34:25; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18:36-38.

¹⁴ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12.206.

¹⁵ *Mk* 7:1-5; *Mt* 15:2; *Lk* 11:38.

were extended to the hands, so that washing the hands was a token of a bath.¹⁶

The predominant function of ablution in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish literature in the Second Temple period is to cleanse an unclean person or object. In the New Testament, the Pharisees carried the practice of ablution to great excess, thereby claiming extraordinary purity (Mt 23:25). Mark 7:1-5 refers to the ceremonial ablutions. The Pharisees washed their hands often or with the fist: ἐὰν μὴ πυγμῇ νίψωνται τὰς χεῖρας οὐκ ἔσθίουσιν (v.3). The baptism of John the Baptist is of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which means turning back from unrighteous behaviors or lives. That is why his baptism was interpreted as an act of cleansing the soul.

Jewish Proselyte Baptism

Not only do scholars today differ widely in their interpretation of the evidence, even the Jews of antiquity seem to have held a wide range of opinions regarding the proselyte.¹⁷ In antiquity the term “proselyte” was used exclusively in the context of Judaism; later it became a technical term for a convert to Judaism. The LXX translates the Hebrew גֵּר with προσήλυτος 77 times, a word designating a resident alien or sojourner in the land. A significant feature is that the term προσήλυτος was used usually in the

¹⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 185-86. According to Sanders, the adoption of the ritual of handwashing among laypeople developed out of their desire to live as priests did in the temple.

¹⁷ See S. J. D. Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 13-33.

context where a religious meaning was prominent.¹⁸ Elsewhere the terms ξένος (Job 31:32; cf. Mt 25:35,43; Eph 2:19) and πάροικος¹⁹ (Gen 23:4; cf. 1 Pet 1:17) were employed.

In the New Testament proselyte usually refers to gentiles who had converted to Judaism. Proselytes from Rome were present at Pentecost (Ac 2:11). Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch, was one of the seven deacons (6:5). “Devout proselytes” (τῶν σεβομένων προσηλύτων) and Jews followed Paul and Barnabas out of the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (13:43). The reference in Matt 23:15 to the Scribes and Pharisees who “traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte” has frequently been taken to refer to the missionary zeal of the Jews in general and the Pharisees in particular.²⁰

Unfortunately, scholars who have addressed the subject agree that there is no proselyte baptism in the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that the nearest analogies to the baptism of John are the baptisms of official Judaism, and especially proselyte baptism. The extent to which the practice and understanding of proselyte baptism influenced the baptism of John and early Christian baptism is a much debated question. The earliest indisputable references to proselyte baptism belong to the

¹⁸ Paul F. Stuehnenberg, “Proselyte,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 503.

¹⁹ For more information about the usages of πάροικος, see John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

²⁰ Stuehnenberg, 503-05.

first century C.E.²¹ While they indicate the probability of its being a pre-Christian initiation, the uncertainty they manifest as to the significance of the rite and especially its relation to circumcision, suggest that its development was gradual and that its interpretation was still evolving during the first century C.E. According to the Law, circumcision is the only requirement of the proselyte (Ex 12:48), but later proselytes have had to be circumcised, baptized and bring the appropriate offering to the Temple.²²

In regard to the origin of proselyte baptism there have been three major theories in the literature. The first one is the position with the earliest date for the ritual. Gedalyahu Alon holds that the immersion of proselytes goes back to the early Second Temple period, in which the purpose of the ritual was to remove the uncleanness of the Gentiles that derives from idols.²³ The second major view, held by Israel Abraham, H. H. Rowley, A.

²¹ The earliest references to proselyte baptism in mainline Judaism are to be found in the Mishnah, claiming that the first century schools of Hillel and Shammai debated matters associated with proselyte baptism. There are two such passages which, though found in two separate places, are verbally identical:

The school of Shammai says: If a man became a proselyte on the day before Passover, he may immerse himself and consume his Passover offering in the evening. And the school of Hillel says: He that separates himself from his circumcision is as one that separates himself from the grave.

See *The Mishnah*, translated by Herbert Danby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 148, 431.

²² George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946-48), 323-58; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?: Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, 1985), 19.

²³ Gedalyahu Alon, *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Time of Second Temple and Talmud*, translated by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 146-89.

Oepke, Aeverbeck, Joachim Jeremias, and Lawrence Schiffman, is that proselyte baptism was a widespread practice at least prior to John the Baptist.²⁴ Lawrence Schiffman admits there is no definite attestation that immersion was required for conversion. Nevertheless, he concludes that it is necessary to date the Jewish ritual prior to John the Baptist in order to explain the historical background for his baptism and that of the early Christians. It seems to be popular among scholars to regard Jewish Proselyte baptism as instituted prior to the work of John the Baptist. Here a debate has raged among scholars concerning whether or not proselyte immersion antedates the baptisms of John the Baptist and the early Christian community. The issue is clearly related to that of influential direction between them. Some critical questions can be raised. Could it be that the Jews copied the Christian initiation act? Is it likely that the Jews would borrow the rite of the despised Christians? The hostility between the two groups, especially the Jew against Christians, in the first two centuries C.E. makes direct borrowing improbable.

The third major theory is that proselyte baptism developed in Judaism in the second half of the first century or in the second century C.E. They would not support the notion that Jewish proselyte baptism provided the pattern for John the Baptist's ministry. Among biblical scholars who hold this position are Charles Scobie and Solomon

²⁴ Israel Abraham, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 30-46; H. H. Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 15 (1940): 313-334; Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, translated by David Cairns (London: SCM, 1960), 24-37; A. Oepke, "βαπτῶ βαπτίζω etc.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and abridged by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 529-46; Richard E. Aeverbeck, "The Focus of Baptism in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 265-301; Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?*

Zeitlin.²⁵

Most modern scholars are willing to concede that Christianity grew up in a Jewish environment and owes much to the rites and beliefs of its parent faith. So it is usual to see John's baptism in the contemporary Jewish lustrations, including the proselyte's bath and to assume that his baptism is the next development. That Jewish proselyte baptism was instituted prior to the work of John the Baptist is supported by scholars, including, J. Jeremias,²⁶ though argument on whether the Jewish proselyte baptism provided the pattern for John the Baptist's ministry is not identical. As expected, the function of Jewish immersion is to express repentance and conversion in symbolizing cleansing from sin. Proselyte immersion was also associated with the expression of repentance, seeking forgiveness and conversion. For this reason, proselyte baptism is claimed as the nearest analogy to the baptism of John. John's baptism, like that of proselytes, is once and for all as a sign of an inner transformation. Another important similarity is that, unlike the ritual lustration in Judaism, proselyte baptism and John's baptism are both initiatory. The goal

²⁵ Charles Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 95-102; Solomon Zeitlin, "A Note on Baptism for Proselyte" *JBL* 52 (1933): 78-79. After the destruction of the temple, argues Scobie, the ritual of immersion could have risen in importance as the only available ritual for female proselyte.

²⁶ Joachim Jeremias has advanced the most comprehensive case for an early date for proselyte baptism, with four basic arguments: 1) proselyte immersion must antedate Christianity because the influence of Christian baptism on the development of a Jewish rite must be excluded as impossible; 2) by the end of the first century B.C.E. a Gentile was considered unclean, and therefore a proselyte would need to be cleansed; 3) certain texts demonstrate the early practice of proselyte immersion, especially *Testament of Levi* 14:6, and also *Sibylline Oracles* 4:162-170; and 4) Christian baptism has many contacts with proselyte baptism in the terminology, rites, catechetical instruction and theology. For further argument, see Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism*, 24-37.

of Jewish washing, including proselyte baptism, is clear: that is ritual purity. In this sense, the proselyte baptism was genealogically linked with existing rites of Levitical purification.²⁷ Judaism had adopted the ordinary ritual lustration for the rite of the initiation of proselytes. As a result of the adoption of new significance, Proselyte baptism was both purificatory and initiatory. It is, however, quite impossible to date the beginnings of the proselyte baptism.

The probable conclusion to be drawn is that, although the evidence is not firm that proselyte baptism antedates the rise of Christianity, it is most unlikely that the Jewish practices would have been established after Christians had already begun baptizing. The sequence must have been the other way around: Jewish proselyte baptism rose prior to Christianity's initiatory rite. If the practice of proselyte baptism is older than the time of John, his baptism may be understood as a reinterpretation of that ritual. John's intention may have been to signify that the whole Jewish people had become like the Gentiles, since they were apostates from the covenant and thus became unclean. John's baptism thus meant a reentry into the covenant relationship or an initiation into an eschatological community, prepared for the judgment of the Lord. However, if proselyte baptism originated later than John, it cannot be the source of meaning of his baptism.

²⁷ Concerning the ritual development of proselyte baptism in Judaism, Harold Rowley writes: "That the baptism of proselytes was different from the ritual lustrations prescribed in the Law is obvious, and while it might be assumed that lustration would be required of every proselyte by a people that required the frequent lustration of its members, and agreed that the baptism of proselytes was a special development from the general ritual lustration, it must be recognized that it is something that goes beyond mere lustration." *From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament* (New York: Association Press, 1963), 225.

One more unsolved issue is that John did not baptize Gentiles, but Jews. It is not the same as proselyte baptism, which had to do with bringing Gentiles into the covenant relationship. John's baptism was the baptism of repentance for those within the covenant nation. So other evidence is needed from the Qumran material.

Qumran Purification Rite

The critical study of baptism has been particularly influenced by some relatively new data from Qumran. There have been numerous studies on the relationship between the baptism of John the Baptist and the water-washing spoken of in 1QS (especially in 1:16-2:25; 3:4-7, etc). Since the Synoptic Gospels say that John preached and baptized in the valley of the Jordan, and Qumran is in the vicinity of the Jordan Valley, it has been alleged by many scholars that John shared the Qumranian life or was in contact with it. It has brought up the question whether or not John was a member of the Qumran community or at least knew about its members, or possibly came into contact with them and was influenced by their teachings and rituals.

A direct or indirect link between John and the Qumranites has been proposed ever since the first scrolls were published. The issue of how John the Baptist may relate to Qumran has polarized into two exclusive conclusions: either he had no significant contact with Qumran²⁸ or he was a Qumranite and thereby profoundly influenced by them. The

²⁸ Donato Baldi and Bellarmino Bagatti, *Saint Jeaan-Baptiste dans les souvenirs*

latter view has gained a wider range of supporters because the similarities between John the Baptist and the Qumranites are too impressive to be ignored as merely an example of a shared milieu. One may suggest, in terms of Josephus' statement, that John the Baptist was a Qumranite, and that it is not known whether John was an Essene at any stage of his life.²⁹ VanderKam also proposes that the series of similarities between John the Baptist and the Qumran community leads some to make strong claims for the Qumran connection of John the Baptist, in speculating that John must have later separated from it to pursue his own ministry.³⁰ James H. Charlesworth supports this argument, though the opinion of the reason John the Baptist was separated or left is not identical.³¹ He explains how John was related with the Qumranites as follows;

There seems no reason to doubt that he adopted at least some of the teachings of the Qumranites, and that he inherited from them at least the interpretation of Isa 40:3, and the impending doom of the end of time. But most probably, John the Baptizer was one who refused full initiation because of the institutionalized hatred of all who were not within the community. John the Baptizer thus seems

de sa patrie (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1980), 61; Carl R. Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 30.

²⁹ Lawrence. H. Schiffman, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist: Reflections on Josephus' Account of John the Baptist," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, edited by Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 340-46. Meanwhile, Thomas M. Finn speculates that John might have been a Qumran initiate. *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York; Paulist Press, 1997), 106.

³⁰ James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 170.

³¹ James H. Charlesworth, "John the Baptizer and Qumran Barriers in Light of the Rule of the Community," in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, edited by Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 356-60.

to be one of the Sons of Dawn who was expelled from, or better left, the Qumran Community.³²

Meanwhile, Lawrence Schiffman claims that John the Baptist could not have been a member of the Qumran community, but that he shared certain ideas and a common religious milieu with them,³³ while Thomas M. Finn speculates that John might have been a Qumran initiate.³⁴ At any rate, it is not surprising to say that there was influence of the Qumranites upon John the Baptist even though John's teachings are apparently different from those of Qumran sect in some aspects.

The Qumran community practiced ritual immersion in order to maintain the ritual purity and sanctity of the community. There were serious implications in the initiatory immersion and baptism of both the Qumranites and John the Baptist. Pfann points out that "they both applied an initiation procedure to Jews that within the rest of Judaism was required only of Gentiles."³⁵ To join in baptism was to leave darkness and come into the light both for John and the Qumran community. In the view of the Qumran community, and likely of John, not simply the world of Jews and Gentiles, but Israel itself was separated into two groups: those who were accepted by God and those who were in

³² Charlesworth, "John the Baptizer and Qumran," 375.

³³ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 404.

³⁴ Finn, *From Death to Rebirth*, 106.

³⁵ Stephen J. Pfann, "The Essene Yearly Renewal Ceremony and the Baptism of Repentance," in *The Provo Internal Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, edited by Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 347-48.

darkness. Therefore, the confession of sin and unworthiness played an important role in the rites (Mt 3:6-9; Mk 1:5b; 1QS 1:24). The community emphasized the upright and humble condition of the heart and spirit during the immersion (1QS 3:8-9). The *Rule of the Community* states that acts of acceptable worship and ritual may be carried out only by those whose hearts have been circumcised, and whose spirits have been endowed with the attributes of the Holy Spirit (1QS 3:7-10).³⁶ Thus, for the Qumranites, the physical act of immersion was insufficient in itself to render the individual fit for participation in community functions. This idea is paralleled by John's proclamation, which focuses on repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

In comparison with the baptism of John the Baptist, some distinctive features are found in Qumran documents.³⁷ First, "at Qumran the distinction between moral sin in the inward parts and the ritual defilement of the flesh was expressed through two different methods of purification. Inner sin was regarded to be cleansed by the Spirit, outer sin by water."³⁸ Second, the celebration of the inner cleansing by the Spirit was part of the rite of initiation because the Spirit of holiness resided in the community.³⁹

³⁶ Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, translated by Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 5-6.

³⁷ Barbara Elizabeth Thiering makes an analysis of key Qumran passages relevant to the rite, IQS 3:6-9 and 4:18-22 from the perspective of two different objects of cleansing with two corresponding instruments of cleansing. See the article "Inner and Outer Cleansing at Qumran as a Background to New Testament Baptism," *NTS* 26 (1980): 266-77.

³⁸ Thiering, "Inner and Outer Cleansing at Qumran," 276.

³⁹ Thiering, 276.

Third, “the rite of washing the flesh was associated with the rite of cleansing with the Spirit, because the outer sin was an expression of the inner sin.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the washing of the flesh was not the real initiation. A washing of the flesh could be practiced repeatedly (1QS 6:18-23), every time the flesh was defiled. The water washing for membership was in the period before full initiation and the reception of the Spirit, described in 1QS 6:13-20.⁴¹

As far as an actual connection between Qumran and John the Baptist is concerned, the biggest problem, however, is that there is no indisputable evidence that John was ever at Qumran. It is undeniable that many key aspects of John’s teaching are different from Qumran theology: “a priestly, exclusive community versus the activity of a prophetic leader; a ritual practiced at least once daily versus an apparently once and for all ritual.”⁴² Furthermore, John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4). That means he did not reject the majority of Jews who were considered by Qumranites as being destined to eternal damnation because they were ‘Sons of Darkness’ (1QS 3-4, etc). Unlike the Qumranites, John urged them to repent and prepare for the final moment of divine act: “When he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’” (Mt 3:7).

Despite the differences, the similarities between John the Baptist and the Qumranites are so impressive that most Qumran scholars concluded that some

⁴⁰ Thiering, 276.

⁴¹ Thiering, 276.

⁴² Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” *StuL* 19 (1989): 32.

relationship must exist between them. They both come from the same geographical area; both involved withdrawal to the desert to await the Lord, in which they were linked to an ascetic lifestyle. Although this feature is not unique to John and the Qumran community, both John and the Qumranites showed a concern for eschatological purification by means of ritual cleansing. At Qumran there are numerous cisterns while John is baptizing where there was much water (Jn 3:23). In addition, both John and Qumranites focused on the prophecy, especially Isaiah 40:3 (Mk 1:2-4; Mt 3:1-2; Jn 1:23; 1QS 8:14), with an eschatological purpose that is to prepare the way for the final act of the Lord (Lk 3:7-9; 1QS 8:13). John and the Qumranites had a concern of the impending doom of the final judgment (1QS 4; Lk 3:9; Mt 3:10). Both held a vision which was prophetic and apocalyptic, and both condemned the religious leaders of the Jews. Even if a direct link cannot be established with certainty, a link in thought, practice, and geography certainly can be established.

Summary

After all of these possible backgrounds for John's baptism, it is clear that baptism as an initiatory rite is not found in the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha, though ritual cleansing by immersion is present. For Jews, circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with his people not with isolated individuals, but with a community bonded to one another in the Lord. For Christians, the same is true of baptism. Baptism is compared with circumcision, as an action that identifies the believer as a member of a new

community (Col 2:11-12). Proselyte baptism as an initiatory rite to Judaism may possibly have begun sometime during the first century C.E., but the baptism for proselytes is not mentioned even in the apocryphal literature.

CHAPTER 3

VIEWS ON THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Christian baptism was not created *ex nihilo*. Baptism as an initiation act is not the creation of Jesus, unlike the other important sacrament of Christian Church, the Lord's Supper, which was instituted by Jesus in the New Testament.¹ All of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles presume that the baptism of John preceded Christian practice. Where, then, did the "baptism of John" (Mk 11:30) come from? In the synoptic tradition, Jesus himself asks this question. The answer to this question, however, is not simple both historically and biblically. Moreover, the account of the Fourth Gospel about Jesus' baptism creates other critical problems for the exegetes. John the Evangelist, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, states three times that Jesus did baptize (3:22, 26; 4:1), but these statements are immediately corrected by the affirmation that it was not Jesus, but his disciples, who baptized (4:2). John 4:2 is perhaps a marginal gloss. In John 1:33 Jesus is presented as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, but the description in chapters 3-4 does not imply that Jesus' baptism was different in kind from that of John the Baptist.² In

¹ Mark 10:38 reflects the two most important sacraments of Christianity. This enables us to consider that baptism, along with the Eucharist, was an essential sacrament in the early Church. Surprisingly enough, the two implied sacraments in Mk 10:38 refer to the death of Jesus.

² That Jesus baptized is found three times in the Fourth Gospel: (1) "After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized" (3:22); (2) "They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, the one

spite of the Johannine statements, many scholars, as Cullmann does, conclude that Jesus himself did not baptize, at least not during his public ministry.³ If Jesus did not baptize, where does then the Christian baptism originate from? John the Baptist and the Mystery Religions are the two possibilities for the origin of Christian baptism in its practice and significance.

John the Baptist

There are two forms of John's title in the New Testament: a formal title, ὁ βαπτιστής and a sort of epithet, ὁ βαπτίζων.⁴ The title ὁ βαπτίζων is spoken by the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel referring to Jesus (1:33), but grammatical analysis illustrates that it is a present active participle in which the verbal meaning of habitual behavior is strongly embedded, so the baptizer could be John, not Jesus. The primary sources for examining the history of John the Baptist are New Testament and Josephus. The short but suggestive passage in Josephus' work is characteristically important because it is one of the few reliable non-biblical sources, though the authenticity of Josephus' narrative

who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him' " (3:26); and (3) "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John' " (4:1). All citations above are from the NRSV.

³ In this case the affirmation of 3:22 could refer to a period when Jesus himself was still a disciple of John the Baptist. Concerning a classical discussion on the foundation of Christian baptism, see Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), 9-22.

⁴ Paul W. Hollenbach, "John the Baptist," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 887.

about John the Baptist has often been questioned. While a few regard it as a Christian description interpolated or colored later, most scholars have accepted it as authentic.⁵ In Josephus' writings as well as the canonical Gospels, John appears as an ascetic solitary in the tradition of Israel's alienated prophets like Elijah. The goal of his message was repentance, for the people needed divine forgiveness. As a result, John and his followers established "a pattern that shaped earliest Christianity: preaching, repentance, a new way of living, and the anticipation of a final purification, with baptism for the forgiveness of sin."⁶

The Qumran community has been well known for ritual immersion as the heart of the rite of initiation, the necessary condition for advancing to full membership. Qumranites were but one among many sects at the Jordan River for whom ritual washing was central: Hemerobaptists, Masbotheans, Sibyllinians, Elchasaites, and Ebionites.⁷ These sects were usually apocalyptic, eschatological groups, tending towards Gnosticism. John 3:23-24 indicates that John the Baptist had a group of followers and continued baptizing during the time of Jesus, who was also baptized by John. Certain Christians regard John the Baptist as the forerunner for Jesus, and Jesus did take up John's mantle of

⁵ The reasons the narrative is believed as authentic are as follows. The text is found in all extant manuscripts of the book. The vocabulary and style are consistent with Josephus' usage, so there is no reason to assume that the passage was inserted. If this passage was a Christian interpolation, it would have described the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. For more information, see Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 39-41; Charles Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 17-22.

⁶ Finn, *From Death to Rebirth*, 107.

⁷ See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.22.6; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 32-40; Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 29-32.

ministering when John went to jail. So the continuity of baptismal movements between John and Christianity can not be denied.

According to Luke, John the Baptist was born of ageing parents into a priestly family in Judea and grew in the wilderness (Lk 1: 5-80). John, however, did not exercise his priestly office, like his father, in the Temple, but he lived as a prophet, preaching and administering a baptism of repentance in the Jordan. As one inquires into John's baptism some questions may arise: Who made John exercise baptism; How and where did he learn about the practice and the meaning of baptism;⁸ Was it different from Jesus', if he baptizes, as the Fourth Gospel reads; How does John's baptism compare with Christian baptism in the New Testament; And why is the portrayal of John the Baptist not identical even within the Gospels? It may be assumed that John the Baptist was perhaps in competition with Jesus. The Jewish historian Josephus describes John as a very important person, with crowds of people following him, and that he was killed because he was a political threat in Palestine.

John the Baptist in Josephus' *Antiquities*

John's baptism attracted enough attention in its time to have been recorded by Jewish historian Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*. Josephus writes:

⁸ This issue was discussed previously, with a conclusion that the theology and the practice of John's baptism were similar to those of Qumran.

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness....⁹

According to Josephus, John the Baptist was remembered by the Jewish people for a long time after his death. The defeat of Antipas' army took place a number of years after his execution of John, yet after that result certain Jews linked the two events together.¹⁰ This linkage certainly implies that John had a high degree of prominence, even after his death. Another valuable source of information Josephus offers is that John was identified as "Baptist" (*Antiquities*, 18:116). The use of this title provides a parallel to the usage in the Synoptic Gospels. Josephus portrays John as one who exhorted people to live uprightly and to practice just acts toward others and piety toward God.¹¹ John baptized people who responded to his preaching. Josephus did not merely state that John practiced a type of baptism (βαπτισμός), but that baptism was part of the message John proclaimed. It is interpreted that "John's call for the Jews to be baptized flowed out of the ethical imperative he preached."¹² The implications of John's preaching and the people's

⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18:116-17. The statement of Josephus was introduced also by Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.11.1-9.

¹⁰ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 34.

¹¹ Webb, 34.

¹² Webb, 34.

response caused Herod Antipas to be afraid.¹³ Josephus states that Antipas was afraid of στάσις (18:118) caused by radical innovation.¹⁴ Antipas clearly perceived the message of John the Baptist as radically innovative, though whether or not this was John's own intention is unclear. Herod arrested and executed John in response to the perceived threat of John. Therefore, the destruction of Herod's army was interpreted by the Jews as divine retribution for this deed (18:119). Most significantly for the subject of this dissertation, John is portrayed as proclaiming and practicing baptism. John's message was an ethical call to live righteously, which would cleanse the soul by being forgiven. At the same time, he performed a baptism for their bodies to be purified. John's theology that baptism was a bodily action parallel to soul cleansing and righteous behavior is well presented in Josephus, but whether this description reflects John's theology or Josephus' viewpoint is ambiguous.

John the Baptist in the Gospels

The earliest Gospel, Mark, introduces John as one whose ministry fulfills prophetic Scripture by preparing the way for the coming of the Lord (Mk 1:2-3). John is playing the dual role of prophet and baptizer. As a prophet, he announces the imminent arrival of a figure who will inaugurate God's salvation by bestowing the Spirit (1:4-8). As a baptist John calls the people to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

¹³ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18:8.

¹⁴ The term στάσις would refer to rebellion against the imperialist authority (*Antiquities*, 18:62).

John's reputation is overwhelming as people, except Jewish leaders (11:30-33), come from all around to be baptized in the Jordan River (1:5). John is presented as the forerunner of Jesus and John's baptismal ministry is preparatory; doing so he fulfills Scripture (1:2-4). As soon as John is arrested after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returns to Galilee where he begins his ministry (1:14-15). Mark 11:27-33 concerns a conflict between the temple leaders and Jesus during Jesus' final week of ministry in Jerusalem. In a debate with the authorities Jesus asked them the question if the baptism of John came from heaven or human origin. The context in which Jesus asks this question not only indicates that he views John as an exceptionally incomparable figure but also implies that Jesus' own authority can be compared with John's. The fasting of John's disciples, however, gives Mark a chance to portray Jesus and his disciples as the new, to be contrasted with the old (2:18-22).¹⁵

Matthew's presentation of John and his ministry does not differ noticeably from that of his major literary sources, Mark and Q. While John is clearly subordinated to Jesus to protect the uniqueness of Jesus, John is also more completely identified and associated with Jesus not only as his ally, but also as the one who prefigures Jesus' death. In 3:1-6, Matthew introduces John as a wilderness preacher who proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2). In describing John's message this way, Matthew has altered Mark's description of John "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4) to a message which is identical to the message proclaimed by Jesus (Mt 4:17 from Mk 1:15). In so doing, Matthew depicts John in close

¹⁵ Hollenbach, "John the Baptist," 888.

association with Jesus more than Mark does.¹⁶ “The forgiveness of sins” is, however, exclusively made by the death of Jesus (Mt 26:28), not in John’s baptism.

Luke’s presentation of John the Baptist is similar to that of Matthew, for both Matthew and Luke utilize the same two sources, Mark and Q. Luke’s portrayal, however, is more extensive because he has incorporated additional material concerning John into his infancy narrative by which he interweaves the stories of the birth of John and Jesus in the earlier part of the Gospel. Due to the relationship between Elizabeth and Mary, John is related to Jesus. Luke’s narrative concerning John, including conception, birth and youth, are used with the purpose to parallel the conception, birth and youth of Jesus.¹⁷ In this way, Luke makes two basic points: John the Baptist and Jesus are closely allied in the scheme of salvation, on the one hand; but John is subordinate to Jesus, on the other hand. This is carefully marked when Mary greets Elizabeth: the fetus leaps in her womb for joy in the presence of the mother of the Lord Jesus (1:41, 44).

In the Gospel of Luke, John is the prophet, most importantly, the prophet of Jesus the Messiah. That is why John is identified as more than a prophet, as the one blessed greatly (7:28). Luke’s perspective is succinctly summed up by Jesus himself in 16:16: “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached.” In the baptism story it is made explicit that Jesus, not John, is the Messiah (3:15–17). While Q 16:16 is found in Mt 11:12-13, in a context in which Jesus is testifying to John’s greatness before the people, Luke uses this material in this different

¹⁶ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 56-57.

¹⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 248-53.

location.¹⁸ John the Baptist is the transitional figure, between “the Law and the Prophets” and Jesus the Christ, introducing Jesus.¹⁹

As Hollenbach points out, John’s prophetic status is emphasized by his prophetic preaching to the wealthy, tax collectors and soldiers (3:10-14; 8:29), and even to Herod. The implied antipathy between John and Herod is echoed later by Herod’s wish to kill Jesus and John’s defiant response (13:31-33). This reference reminds one that Luke omitted the story of John’s execution by Herod (after 9:7-9), and this omission may express Jesus’ distinctive superiority to John, for it is the Messiah who must suffer and die in a special way (24:26).²⁰

Ten pericopae are found in the Fourth Gospel that contains references to John the Baptist, whose major role centers on witnessing Jesus’ true identity. John the Baptist explicitly identifies Jesus as his expected figure (1:31-33; 3:26-30), announcing that Jesus is the Lamb of God (1:29, 36) and the Messiah (3:28). This proclamation is contrasted to the Synoptic Gospels where the identification is made by the Evangelists and not by the Baptist himself. John 1:1-18 is concerned with the Christian community preserving the ‘incarnation’ Christology. Though Jesus may have begun his ministry after John and

¹⁸ Hans Conzelmann interprets that the saying clearly reveals the place of John within salvation-history, in his book *The Theology of St Luke*, trans. by G. Buswell (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 23.

¹⁹ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2, Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1115; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 51-57; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 628-29.

²⁰ Hollenbach, “John the Baptist,” 890.

might even have appeared to be John's disciple, "the *Logos* became flesh" is qualitatively superior to John because of his pre-existence.²¹ The Fourth Gospel portrays John as a witness sent by God (1:6), but John is not the light; rather Jesus is the Light (Jn 8:12). Since Jesus is the Light he ranks above John.²² In the Fourth Gospel whose context is in the "incarnation Christology," the Baptist's role of forerunner is definitely unnecessary, because the *Logos* exists already (1:15, 30) and thus has no forerunner. Jesus as the *Logos* exists even before Abraham in 8:58: πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί ("before Abraham was, I am"). This saying provokes the Jews,²³ forcing them to pick up stones to throw (8:59). From the Johannine Christological perspective, Jesus is not the one who needs baptism and repentance, but rather he is a baptizer. That is why the clear accounts in the Synoptics that Jesus was baptized are missing in the Fourth Gospel. That Jesus is a baptizer, however, causes another christological problem; it contradicts what John prophesized that Jesus will baptize "with Holy Spirit" (1:33). Jesus did not baptize any kind of baptism in his life. Even if he did baptize as the Fourth Gospel mentions, the baptism seems never different from the baptism John the Baptist performed. The water baptism alone did not fit John's expectation. In John's expectation, Jesus is supposed to baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:33). So the accounts that Jesus did baptize with water should have been corrected (4:2). This correction shows that the significance and

²¹ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 72.

²² Webb, 71-72.

²³ In the Fourth Gospel "the Jews" is carefully used to refer to the religious authorities hostile to Jesus, particularly those in Jerusalem, in contrast to Galileans who receive him.

practice of Jesus' baptism is not interpreted in an identical way even in the canonical Gospels, mainly because of the different Christology each Gospel represents.

In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist is not a forerunner for the Messiah, unlike in the Synoptic Gospels. He is a witness sent by God; simply the voice announcing the coming of Jesus as Lord and Son of God (1:23, 34), who was revealed to him and Israel as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29, 36). John baptizes only with water (1:26, 31) while Jesus the one who baptizes "with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). Furthermore, John's disciples turn to Jesus because they too recognize him as the Messiah (1:35-41). Even when John's disciples report him that Jesus and his disciples are "making and baptizing more disciples than John" (3:26; 4:1), he is not annoyed at all; rather he is filled with joy because these developments verify his testimony as true: he must decrease while Jesus Christ must increase (3:30).²⁴

Summary

Gospel materials that emphasize John's relationship in subordination to Jesus are seen as evidence for the existence of group(s) of John's followers in the era when the Gospels were written. It is sometimes asserted that the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of John the Baptist is a polemic against baptist sect(s) who had developed a rival doctrine of

²⁴ Hollenbach, "John the Baptist," 890.

Messiah.²⁵ Only John the Evangelist reports that the Baptist's disciples become Jesus' first disciples (Jn 1:37, 40). The Gospel of Mark states that Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, and afterward, Jesus "came up out of the water" (ἀναβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, Mk 1:10). It is beyond doubt that Jesus was baptized.²⁶ The first introduction to the subject of baptism in the New Testament is through the Baptist. John's baptism played an especially important role in beginning the ministry of Jesus on earth. John's baptism, typically practiced by full immersion in the Jordan River, is defined as "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." This concept of a baptism of repentance, and for the forgiveness of sins later becomes an important element of Christian baptism. It might be agreed that Christian baptism somehow was based upon the baptism of John the Baptist. This form of baptism is summed up in Mark 1:4 and Acts 2:38. An unbroken continuity from the baptism of John to the baptism practiced by the early Christians is, hence, undeniable.

²⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 17-18. According to Bultmann, Johannine polemic is to dispute the claim that the Baptist has the authority of Revealer.

²⁶ Most New Testament scholars affirm the historicity of Jesus' baptism. For example: Hans Conzelmann, *Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 31; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist*, 142; Ben Witherington, "Jesus and the Baptist---Two of a Kind?" in *SBL Seminar Papers: Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting 1988*, ed. David John Lull, SBLASP 27 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 227. That Jesus was baptized by John has been a matter of concern of many other scholars: E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of A Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

John the Baptist in Non-Canonical Writings

The extra-canonical Gospels do not contain the quantity of data concerning John the Baptist found in the canonical Gospels. Their concern appears to focus more exclusively upon the relationship between John and Jesus, whereas the canonical Gospels provide some description of John himself and his ministry. The *Gospel of Thomas* contains little narrative due to its focus on Jesus' sayings, and so there are no narrative references to John the Baptist. Neither does the Gospel contain any sayings of John. The only references to John are contained in the *logia* of Jesus. Logion 46 reads Jesus expressing an exalted opinion of John the Baptist, but this opinion is balanced by the statement that those within the kingdom are greater than John. Logion 78²⁷ echoes the saying in Mt 11:7-11 and Lk 7:24-28 where Jesus praise John, but in the *Gospel of Thomas* Jesus talks about himself; there is no reference to John the Baptist. The *Gospel of Thomas* shows little interest in John. Also, the *Gospel of the Nazareans* only contains sayings of Jesus about John, and they are concerned with christological issues. The *Gospel of the Ebionites* describes John focusing upon his baptizing ministry, which is described in essentially the same terms as in the Canonical Gospels, but it has been shaped to be consistent with the Ebionite lifestyle. John is portrayed as a priest with a wilderness lifestyle who baptizes with a baptism of repentance; no mention is made of

²⁷ Jesus said, "Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothes, [like your] rulers and your powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothes, and they cannot understand truth" (*Gos. Thom.* 78). Translation by Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer.

John preaching or being a prophet. The *Protoevangelium of James* appears to be largely independent of the canonical Gospels, but John has no role explicitly attributed to him.²⁸

Initiation into Greco-Roman Mystery Religions

Baptism as an initiation did not originate in Judaism. The early Jews did not perform the full immersion in water to be admitted to Judaism,²⁹ but instead circumcision was necessary to be admitted. As far as Christian baptism is concerned, Greco-Roman religions ought to be explored more seriously. Along with Judaism, the Greco-Roman “mystery religions”³⁰ were the most influential religions before and after Jesus. Unlike

²⁸ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 77-85.

²⁹ As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the baptism as initiation is not found in the Old Testament. The Jewish tradition that the proselytes had to be baptized was as late as the first century. For the early Jews, it was circumcision, not baptism, that was required of converts.

³⁰ A critical and historical approach on Christian baptism by means of studying the various mystery religions is employed in this chapter and is deeply indebted to a marvelous piece of work from Andrew D. Benson, *The Origins of Christianity and the Bible: An Historical and Archaeological Approach* (Clovis, Calif.: Prudential Publishing, 2003).

For more detailed information about the initiations in mystery religions, see Marvin W. Meyer ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), esp. 160-72, 176-93; Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM, 1976); Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 197; Bruce Metzger, “Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity,” *HTR* 48 (1955): 6; Günter Bornkamm, “μυστήριον, μυσέω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.4, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and abridged by G. W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids:

the official religions, in which a person was expected to show outward, public allegiance to the local gods of the *polis* or the state, and aimed at maintaining the well-being of that society, the mysteries served to provide their initiates with a rich religious experience in a privacy of worship within closed groups.³¹ This section is interested in how the rite of Christian baptism was preached and understood in the first century when and where the Greco-Roman culture prevailed. Every region in the Greco-Roman world produced its own mystery religion. The cults of Demeter and Dionysus, as well as the Eleusinian and Orphic mystery religions, which developed later, come out of Greece. In Asia Minor the cult of Cybele and her beloved, a shepherd named Attis, was celebrated. The cult of Isis and Osiris (later identified to Sarapis) originated in Egypt, while Persia produced the cult of Mithras, which held a special appeal to Roman soldiers. It can be said, as Thomas Finn claims, that “What made the Mediterranean world Greco-Roman was culture.”³² Concerning culture and religion in the Hellenistic world, Finn writes,

In Greco-Roman antiquity, culture and religion were inseparable, so much so that worship and culture were interchangeable. Indeed, the word *culture* derives from the word *colere* (“to cultivate”) and denotes a worshiper (*cultor*); similarly, worship derives from *cultus*. How people tended divinity was the wellspring of ancient culture. The appurtenances of culture, such as art, architecture, dance, drama, literature, and music, were works of worship. (.....) Religion is the traditional way of offering dutiful reverence to divinity. The heart of the matter was ritual: the kind and content of religious observances properly performed

Eerdmans, 1967), 802-28; G. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired Not One True Christianity, But Many* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 144-50.

³¹ Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 4.

³² Finn, *From Death to Rebirth*, 1. See also James D. Newsome, *Greeks, Romans, Jews: Contents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World* (Philadelphia: Trinity International Press, 1992), 1-32.

(*ritus*). The culture of the Greco-Roman world was a ritual culture, one that knew, understood, performed, and even abused its rites.³³

As mentioned, mystery religions were widespread religious cults that existed in ancient Greece and later, Roman Empire. Orphism, Bacchaic and the Eleusinian mysteries are the best known of the early Greek mysteries. In later Greece and Rome, these were joined by such mysteries as the worship of Mithras and Isis. The rites of the mysteries were so diverse that it may not be easy to reconstruct a theology which would apply to all of them. Moreover, it is hard to find their origins. Given the variety and their unknown origins, there is difficulty in defining precisely mystery religion. Even though there was not only one common mystery religion, however, several common traits can be drawn. Most of all, the reason the Greco-Roman cults were called mystery religions was that they involved secret ceremonies known only to those initiated into the cult. Central to each mystery was its use of an annual vegetation cycle in which life is renewed each spring and died each fall. Members of the mystery cults found deep symbolic significance in the natural processes of growth, death, decay, and rebirth. Not only plants and animals but also human beings participated in a cycle of death and life. Meyer writes:

Death came to all the divine forces of nature---Kore, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis, Osiris, the Mithraic bull---but finally life was victorious. Kore returned from the realm of Hades; Dionysus vivified his devotees; Adonis rose from the dead; Attis gave an intimation of new life; Osiris reigned as king of the underworld; and the bull provided life for the world.³⁴

³³ Finn, 8.

³⁴ Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 7-8.

Each cult made important use of secret ceremonies or mysteries, often in connection with an initiation rite. Each mystery religion also passed on a secret to the initiate that included information about the life of the cult's god or goddess and how humans might achieve unity with that deity. This knowledge was always a secret or esoteric knowledge unattainable by any outside the circle of the cult. The primary goal of the initiates was a mystical experience that led them to feel they had achieved union with their deity. In a secret rite, the individual participated of his own free choice, and by it, a participant was put into a closer relation with the deity honored.³⁵

The term mystery (μυστήριον) derives from the Greek verb μύειν, referring to the closing of the lips or the eyes.³⁶ In the mysteries initiates needed to keep silent for the mystery in order to keep the sacred secret from being revealed to outsiders. For example, the Greek general Alcibiades may have been accused of betraying the pledge of silence by disclosing the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter and Kore during a drinking party.³⁷ The term "mystery" is slightly different from "secret." "A mystery is a truth that can be understood only by divine revelation, while a secret is knowledge that is merely

³⁵ Arthur Darby Nock, "Early Gentile Christianity," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, vol.1, edited by Zeph Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 53. See also Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 34-36.

³⁶ Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 4. See also Günter Bornkamm, "μυστήριον, μύεω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol.4, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated and abridged by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 803.

³⁷ Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 19.1-2.

hidden.”³⁸ The word “mystery” is a critical term in the New Testament, where it denotes a secret aspect of Christ’s salvific work that is beyond ordinary human comprehension but now revealed. In Mark 4:11-12, μυστήριον has been given only to the insider, referring in this passage to the 12 disciples. The *Gospel of Philip*, one of the most important texts from the *Nag Hammadi Library* for the knowledge of rituals in early Gnostic communities, also talks about the rites performed in mystery.³⁹ Mystery appears in the New Testament twenty two times in the singular and five times in the plural. Sometimes it is understood as rendering “enigma” and a “riddle,” for example, in Mark 4:11. Several references show how Christianity understood itself in the early period when mystery religions were widespread. Paul makes it clear in 1 Cor 4:1 that Christianity is a “mystery religion.” Hellenistic Christianity is considered as “the mystery of Christ (Col 4:3)” in comparison with the other mysteries, such as Dionysus and Isis. Paul clearly defines his proclamation of Christian message as the “revelation of the mystery” which was kept secret for long ages (Rom 16:25), and the idea of “the mystery of Christ (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ)” has often been used in Deutero-Pauline Letters, and the succeeding Church fathers, for example, Clement.⁴⁰

³⁸ Benson, *Origins of Christianity and the Bible*, 173.

³⁹ The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber. [...] he said, “I came to make the things below like the things above, and the things outside like those inside. I came to unite them in the place.” [...] here through types [...] and images (*Gos. Phil.*, 67:27-30).

⁴⁰ Eph 3:4; Col 4:3. Also mentioned in Eph 1:9; Col 1:27; 2:2, where the mystery is the Christ himself through whom we know the knowledge of God’s mystery. Also, Clement mentions, “As I wrote afore in few words, according as ye are able to

In Paul's theology resurrection is a mystery (1 Cor 15:51), too. It is essential to recognize that an initiate into the mystery religions was required to keep his or her lips closed and not disclose the secret that was revealed at the private ceremony; the penalty for revealing the mysteries to outsiders was sometimes death.⁴¹ However, "Christian converts who once had been initiated into the mystery religions sometimes felt no hesitation about betraying the mysteries and readily unveiled what they believed to be godless and shameless secrets."⁴² This is supported by Paul's gospel which is basically a mystery, but "for which Paul opens his mouth boldly to make known" (Eph 6:19), to the Gentiles. As mentioned, several canonical Epistles articulate the mystery hidden for ages and generations (Col 1:26; Eph 5:32) but now made manifest to the Hellenistic Christians. They became realizing that the gods to whom they were enslaved were not true gods to believe (Gal 4:8-11; 1 Cor 8:4-6). For the Christians the mystery was not a secret anymore but became an "open secret."⁴³ As the result of the revelation of the mystery, the believers must hold fast to the "mystery of the faith" (1 Tim 3:19). In this sense, it could be said that Paul's preaching in gentile areas is a way of introducing a new religion of

understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, 1.28).

⁴¹ See Plutarch, *Lives*, 4.22.3-4. As mentioned above, Plutarch says that Alcibiades escaped death by running away to Sparta, for Alcibiades committed a crime against the goddesses of Eleusis. The fault was his mimicking the mysteries and showing them forth to his companions.

⁴² Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 5.

⁴³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Letter to the Colossians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol.11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 615.

mystery. In 1 Tim 3:16, Christians believe that “the mystery of our religion is great”:

μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον.

In accordance to Paul and his school, the Christian Church father Ignatius calls the Ephesian Christians “fellow initiates” with Paul.⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria invited pagans to be initiated into the Christian faith, illuminating Christianity as “sacred mysteries.”⁴⁵ Clement continues that the Lord, as a *hierophant*, seals the initiates to keep them safe for ever.⁴⁶ Justin Martyr similarly asserts that Jesus Christ, who is the first-begotten of God the Father, was crucified, died, arose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven, “is nothing new or different from what they say about the so-called sons of Jupiter.”⁴⁷ He tries to make people sure that Christian beliefs are not much different from their beliefs, except the idea of the crucified Christ.⁴⁸ The Christian message about the crucified Christ seemed to be hard to perceive because this was not easily found in their

⁴⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *Ignatius to the Ephesians*, 12.2.

⁴⁵ He writes, “Then shalt thou see my God, and be initiated into the sacred mysteries, and come to the fruition of those things which are laid up in heaven reserved for me,” in *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 12, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition, revised by A Cleveland Coxe, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), 205.

⁴⁶ Clement, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch 12.

⁴⁷ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 53, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, eds., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, American reprint of the Edinburgh Edition, revised by A Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 180.

⁴⁸ “But in no sense, not even in any of those called sons of Jupiter, did they imitate the being crucified; for it was not understood by them...” (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 55).

tradition. One may be reminded of Paul's preaching about "Crucified Christ" in 1 Cor 1:23: "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον) to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."⁴⁹ One of the characteristics in studying the mystery religions is that they preceded Christianity, as Justin affirms. Tertullian also acknowledges the striking similarities between the pagan descriptions of eternal life and the corresponding descriptions in the New Testament. He refers to Christianity as the mysteries, but he falsely accuses the Greek philosophers and poets for borrowing from Christianity, claiming that the mysterious ideas of Christianity are older than their pagan parallels. He writes:

Whence is it, I pray you have all this, so like us, in the poets and philosophers? The reason simply is, that they have been taken from our religions. But if they are taken from our sacred things, as being of earlier date, then ours are the truer, and have higher claims upon belief, since even their imitations find faith among you. If they maintain their sacred mysteries to have sprung from their own minds, in that case ours will be reflections of what are later than themselves, which by the nature of things is impossible, for never does the shadow precede the body

⁴⁹ The Pauline gospel about the "Crucified Christ" would not be easy to understand in the Greco-Roman world. How is it possible for the eternal Son of God to suffer as an ordinary man? It is definitely natural and perfectly intelligible for the people in Greco-Roman world to understand Jesus' death as proof of divine punishment for his ὑβρις (cf. LXX, Jer 27:32=50:32 in NRSV). For the Romans, crucifixion was primary a shameful punishment (See, Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977, 46). In the Greek world, Jesus' dying on the cross contradicted the contemporary philosophical notion of god who cannot suffer and is free from suffering. The very idea of a god enduring the death of a criminal was no doubt awkward to Greek consciousness. Also, from the viewpoint of the Jews, Jesus suffered a death reserved for slaves (Phil 2:6-8), criminals, and political rebels. Jesus seemed not the victorious Messiah but an executed traitor in Jewish eyes, one cursed by God. Deu 21:23 and Gal 3:13 read: "Anyone hung on a tree is under God's **curse**." Therefore, the title 'Son of God' is not deserved by him. Useful information about the understanding of the hero in antiquity is well presented in Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus*, 31-60.

which casts it, or the image the reality.⁵⁰

According to Justin Martyr and Tertullian, the similarities between mysteries (especially Mithraism) and Christianity were due to their demonic imitation of Christianity. Though denying that it was Christianity who imitated the mystery religions, they verify that the Greek mystery religions practiced baptismal activity before Christianity. Likewise, Clement of Alexandria considers Christianity as the mystery religion with “truly sacred mysteries,” which offer the pure light and vision of the only true God, whereas he called the pagan mysteries shameless and corrupt. In response to Celsus who mentioned “the other mysteries,” that is, the mystery religions besides Christianity,⁵¹ Origen, referring to Christianity, calls “our mysteries.”⁵² The apologetic claims above cited might reveal how similar Christianity was to the Greco-Roman mystery religions. For the Church fathers, Christianity was essentially one of the mystery religions of the first centuries. The major difference between the two is that, as Clement of Alexandria claims, Christianity was actually the true and the best because it managed to beat its competitors and forerunners centuries later. Paul in his Epistle to Galatians convinces them that they were enslaved to being that by nature no god (Gal 4:8-11; 1 Cor 8: 4-6). Christians realized that all the gods in other mystery religions were not true.

⁵⁰ Tertullian, *Apology*, 47, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings*, 3: 52.

⁵¹ Celsus in his discussion of Christianity considered it as one of the mystery religions (Celsus, *Fragments from Origen 'Against Celsus,'* 3.59).

⁵² Origen, *Against Celsus*, 3.59, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings*, 4: 487.

Several mystery religions, such as the religion of Eleusis, Isis, Sarapis, Mithra, and various Gnostic sects, originated or were established in Greece, Egypt, Persia, and Syria. Each of the mystery religions commonly emphasized personal salvation. In contrast to some texts of the Old Testament, which pointed out the inaccessible gap between God and humankind, those religions promised their believers union with the gods, so that an initiate would be elevated to the realm of the deity. Thus, the initiates would take on the likeness of their cult deity. This process is paralleled to Romans 6:5, where Paul expresses Christian initiation through which the baptized has been united with Christ in the “likeness” (ὁμοίμα) of his death. Whereas Judaism was unpopular partly because it promised rewards only to the chosen Jews, the gods of the mystery religions were favorable because they were believed to offer salvation from transgression and the promise of immortality to everyone regardless of their nationality. Christianity, unlike the Jewish religion, similarly recognized that there is no distinction between the Jew and the Gentiles. The gods of many mystery religions died and rose, though not all the mysteries had dying and reviving gods. The mystery initiates secured immortality for themselves by ritually reenacting the death and resurrection of their god. Paul insists that the Christian initiates symbolically die and rise with Jesus who also died and rose again from the dead (Rom 6:3, 5-6, 8).

In the mystery religions the personal relationship with the deity was also attained by the initiate through a sacred meal. The initiate ate “sacred food,” and it was as though he or she ate the deity and thereby became like the deity. The chief ritual in the mysteries of Dionysus, Orphism, and Mithra was the sacred meal shared in communion. Christians

centered many of their meetings on their meals, and sacred meals were closely related to the initiation process. In the early Churches these communion meals were called “agape meals.”⁵³ Also, as in the Qumran community, the Eucharistic meal signified a messianic banquet.⁵⁴ In addition, the messianic banquet is commonly found in the mythology where the gods and the blessed take part in a banquet. In other words, festive meals were held in all sorts of voluntary associations in the Greco-Roman world. There were also meal customs in Judaism, for example, Passover, or the gatherings of religious sectaries, such as the special meals of the Pharisees. The Last Supper mentioned in Mark 14:22-24 could be a common Jewish sacred meal. Their meals included hand washing, lighting lamps, blessing and breaking of the bread and drinking a cup of wine. However, the bread and wine of the Jewish meals did not symbolize the body and the blood of their God. That difference between Judaism and Christianity can not be reconciled.

In the mystery religions the initiate attained union with the cult deity and was endowed with immortality. The notions of imitation of a deity and union with a god or goddess occur in Stoics, for example, in Epictetus’ work: the initiate is in union with the deity and at the same time the deity lives in the initiate.⁵⁵ Paul, who grew up at Tarsus, a

⁵³ Jude 12. Also, Acts 6:1-2 probably reflects an “agape meal.”

⁵⁴ 1 QS^a 2:11-2; Acts 6:1-2; Jn 6:51-57; Rev. 19:17; Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 20:2. A more specific social context for creative interpretation of Christian teaching and traditions, then, would have been meals in homes where Christians gathered. A good example of a formal religious meal is the Lord’s Supper in Luke 22. The apostle Paul had judged that the celebration of the meal at Corinth was being abused by gentile Christians accustomed to more Hellenized-style banquets.

⁵⁵ Epictetus, *Discourse*, 2.14.13.

Stoic center,⁵⁶ is able to state that Christ lives in him: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This statement shows that the notion of union with deity existed before the Christianity and the writing of the New Testament. There was another important symbolic ritual practiced in an initiation ceremony: “the putting on the deity.” The initiates into mysteries believed that the *mystai*, by putting on the robe, might have been growing spiritually to be putting on the deity. Paul in his Epistle to Galatians teaches that those who are baptized into Christ have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Furthermore, mystery devotees, according to Plato, considered each other brothers.⁵⁷ Paul likewise calls the Corinthian Christians brothers (1 Cor 16:12). Any distinction, based on socio-economic class, gender,⁵⁸ and race, becomes meaningless there. Based upon this consideration, Paul teaches that “All are one in Christ” (Gal 3:28).

As mentioned before, the gods of the mystery religions, such as Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Dionysus, were believed to have died and were reborn. It is certain that the idea of a god dying and rising is much older than Christianity. Not only the gods but also various demi-gods and heroes were believed to have gone down to Hades and come back. Persephone in the mysteries of Eleusis, Orpheus in Orphism, and Dionysus, went to Hades and returned to life.⁵⁹ In the same way, the Son of God Jesus also descended and

⁵⁶ According to Acts 17:16-21, Paul meets some of the Stoic Philosophers at Athens. The Stoics regard Paul as “a preacher of foreign divinities.”

⁵⁷ Plato, *Epistle*, 7.333.

⁵⁸ Mithraism is an exception for it was a religion for men only.

⁵⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 179; Diodorus of Sicily, Book 4.25.4.

returned from “Hades” (“heart of the earth” in Mt 12:40; “prison” in 1 Pet 3:19). This idea was acceptable without trouble to the Hellenistic Christians simply because it was not different from the existing stories they had known. Justin Martyr admits that Christianity used several beliefs, which constitute the Christian view of Christ, from the mystery religions, by claiming that the belief is not something new but was there already.⁶⁰ Gregory Riley agrees that the early Churches had taken not only its most valuable rites, such as baptism and Eucharist, but also other ideas, from their own Greco-Roman world in which Christianity arose.⁶¹ That is a reason why the Gentile Christians were blamed by some Gentiles for borrowing their beliefs of religions.⁶² Some of mystery religions will be examined in detail in order to explore their influence on Christianity.

The Mysteries of Eleusis

The most influential and popular of the Greek mysteries were the Eleusinian mysteries.⁶³ Celebrated at Eleusis near Athens, these mysteries focused upon Demeter, the “Grain Mother,” and Kore, the “Maiden.” The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was one of the earliest and most important literary witnesses to the Eleusinian mysteries. It is

⁶⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 20-21.

⁶¹ Gregory J. Riley, *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 5.

⁶² Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 47.12.

⁶³ See, Karl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

assumed that this myth was the product of an Eleusinian circle and that it reveals “the aims and intention of participation in the mystery rites which were celebrated.”⁶⁴ There they reenacted the myth of Demeter’s search and her reunion with her daughter Persephone. From early times an agricultural cult at Eleusis observed rituals commemorating the fertility and life of grain, while the later Eleusinian mysteries employed similar rituals, but directed particular attention at the transformed life of people. At first, the Eleusinian mysteries were restricted to the citizens of Eleusis and Athens, but during the Hellenistic era they became open to non-Greeks. In the second century B.C.E., they spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and survived until the end of the fourth century C.E. Many prominent Romans, including Sulla, Anthony, Cicero, and Atticus, were initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries.⁶⁵

As mentioned, the secret ceremonies of the mystery religions remain largely veiled. Because of the oaths of secrecy, only limited written evidence of what exactly took place in the initiation ceremony is brought to the later generations. In the Eleusinian mysteries there were three types of sacred observances the initiates participated in:

⁶⁴ Larry J. Alderink, “Mythical and Cosmological Structure in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter,” *Numen* 29 (1982): 1.

⁶⁵ Benson, *Origins*, 180.

legomena (“things recited”), *deiknymena* (“things shown”),⁶⁶ and *dromena* (“things performed”).⁶⁷ The *legomena* may have been recitation of the “hieros logos,”⁶⁸ interpretations of the stories of the deities, or responses of the initiates to the divine mystery. There were the lesser mysteries, a preparation for the greater ones. The initiates took an oath of secrecy before preparing for the greater mysteries. The greater mysteries included baptism in the sea, three days of fasting, and the completion of the mysterious central rite. These acts completed the initiation, and the initiate was promised rewards in the life after death.⁶⁹ Tertullian criticizes the Eleusinian rite of baptism because they presume that the effect of their baptism is their regeneration and the remission of the penalties due their perjuries.⁷⁰ A similar kind of ritual of baptism was found in the early Christian Church in which repentance before baptism was required. One may acknowledge that long before Christianity the Eleusinians instituted the ritual of baptism as part of initiation into the mystery.

⁶⁶ Hippolytus observes that among the “things shown” in certain Eleusinian mysteries was a single head of grain that was beheld in silence, apparently as a manifestation of the life in grain and in all (*Against Heresies*, 5.8.39).

⁶⁷ Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 10.

⁶⁸ It refers to the “sacred account” that provided the mythological foundation for the celebration of the mysteries.

⁶⁹ Benson, *Origins*, 181.

⁷⁰ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings*, 3: 671.

The Mysteries of Dionysus and Orphics

Related to the Eleusinian mysteries were the cults of Dionysus and the Orphics. The mysteries of Dionysus (or Bacchus) were remarkably diverse in character and ritual practice.⁷¹ Dionysus was the Greek god of fertility, animal maleness, wine, drama, and ecstasy. As portrayed in Euripides' *Bacchae*, the archaic mysteries of Dionysus involved the female devotees of the god participating in the raw power of Dionysus by tenderly nursing wild animals or savagely tearing animals to pieces. In the Dionysiac mystery the initiates would go into a temporary sacred madness, and their soul would wing its way to unite with the god Dionysus. According to Plato, the mystery initiates believed that through the secret rituals they would gain secret knowledge and thus accomplish a mystical union with the divine.⁷² Seneca also mentioned the same idea of the initiates' union with god: "god is near you, he is with you, he is within you."⁷³ There are striking similarities between this religion and Christianity. In a Christian understanding the soul would be "with God" or "in God." In the New Testament the idea of dwelling "in God" or "in Christ" appears in the letters from Paul and John who were familiar with the Greek

⁷¹ For more detailed information of the Dionysiac cult, see Martin P. Nilsson, *The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1965). About the mysteries of Orphics, see W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1952).

⁷² Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253a.

⁷³ Seneca, *Epistles: On the God Within Us*, 41.1.

philosophical understanding of deity.⁷⁴ Further, the idea of God placing seals on the bodies of his followers in the Johannine and Pauline writings (Jn 6:27; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Rev 9:4) is reminiscent of this mystery religion of Dionysus (3 Macc 2:29).⁷⁵ At the time of Antiochus the followers of Dionysus carried the seal of Dionysus on their bodies, whereas in the Book of Revelation the seal of God for salvation is in their foreheads Rev 9:4).⁷⁶ The mysteries of Dionysus were popular in Palestine and in Alexandria before Christianity. This popularity is proved by the statement of Justin Martyr that there were Christians who once worshipped Bacchus, as well as Aesclepius, or many other so-called gods, but through Jesus Christ hold these in contempt, under the threat of death.⁷⁷ It can be claimed that Dionysian beliefs were introduced and applied to Christianity by Alexandrian Jews who joined Christianity and Gentiles who before joining Christianity worshipped Dionysus.⁷⁸

The Orphics worshipped the infant god Zagreus-Dionysus, the son of Zeus from a mortal woman named Semele.⁷⁹ They commemorated with yearly rites the passion and

⁷⁴ Gal 3:28; Rom 16:7; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 4:15.

⁷⁵ Benson, *Origins of Christianity*, 183.

⁷⁶ Benson, *Origins of Christianity*, 183.

⁷⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 25.

⁷⁸ Benson, *Origins of Christianity*, 183.

⁷⁹ Hera, the wife of Zeus, being jealous of her husband's infidelity, sent the Titans to slaughter and cut to pieces the newborn Dionysus. In one version of the myth the goddess Rhea gathered the limbs of the infant and Dionysus was resurrected. For further, see Hesiod, *Theogony*, 940-42; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4.17; Plutarch, *Moralia: On Isis and Osiris*, 338-39.

rebirth of Dionysus, the son of god. They had sacramental communion with their god, Zagreus-Dionysus, who had suffered, died, and risen. Among the Orphics there was the Dionysian practice of tearing flesh (*sparagmos*) and devouring it raw (*ómophagia*), through which the Orphics became one with their god. The Christian communion is almost identical to the Orphic ritual. The Gospel of John 6:55-56 reads: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (NRSV). Justin Martyr reports that Christians used wine and bread in their communion. Justin Martyr says, however, that the Dionysians were practicing communion before the Christians, but they did so because the devil imitated an ancient prophecy of the Old Testament.⁸⁰

That the Orphics practiced the mystery of communion long before Christianity is evident. There are several significant parallels between the Orphics and the Hellenistic Christians. The Orphics believed that Dionysus had a two-fold nature in terms of his birth from the divine Zeus and the mortal Semele.⁸¹ This two-fold nature parallels the Christian belief, in particular of Johannine Christianity, that Jesus is divine and human at the same time. Second, late texts reflecting Orphic eschatology put an emphasis on the role of Dionysus as king of the New Age. For the Christians, when Jesus returns he will be the king of the New Age. Though a child, Dionysus was made to reign over all the kings in the universe. For the Gentile Christians, Jesus is genuinely the king of kings (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16). Dionysus was called “lord” in their mysteries, but now

⁸⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 69.

⁸¹ Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1-3.

Jesus is the real Lord for the whole world.⁸² Third, in the myth, Dionysus was persecuted and killed, but finally revived. Christians have witnessed and confessed Jesus' persecution, death, and victory against the evil power through resurrection. This is related to the theme of descent into Hades in both religions. Orpheus and Dionysus went to Hades and returned. That Orpheus was sent back from Hades is mentioned by Plato.⁸³ In addition, several demigods and heroes, like Pollux, Theseus, and Hercules, went down to Hades and came back.⁸⁴ The Christian way of narrating the stories of Jesus' passion and resurrection was not different from theirs.

The Mysteries of Isis and Osiris

The mysteries of Isis⁸⁵ were also established before the Christian era and became

⁸² Benson, *Origins of Christianity*, 185.

⁸³ Plato, *Symposium*, 179d. See also Diodorus of Sicily, Book 4,25.4.

⁸⁴ Benson, *Origins*, 177.

⁸⁵ The mystery of Isis had its roots in the Egyptian religion of Osiris, which existed more than 2300 years B.C.E. It is said that the cult of Isis became a mystery religion after Ptolemy the First introduced major changes, something after 300 B.C.E. During the Hellenistic era Egypt fell under the rule of the Greek kings, the Ptolemies, the successors of Alexander. The Egyptian religion of Osiris was fused with the Greek mystery religions. The result of this syncretism was the mystery religion of Isis and Osiris. For further studies, see W. R. Pearson, "Baptism and Initiation in the Cult of Isis and Sarapis," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSS 171 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999); 42-62; H. Idris Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1957); Meyer, *Mystery Religions*, 155-96.

widespread around the Mediterranean during the first century C.E. With rituals similar to those of Dionysus and a goddess resembling Demeter, the Isis Mysteries were nothing unique in the Roman religious system. The main competition for the Isis mysteries as the predominant cult in the Roman Empire came originally from Mithras and later from Christianity. At the peak of its popularity, the cults of Isis were the most numerous in the Empire. However, the Isis mysteries slowly lost ground to Christianity and had faded into obscurity by the end of the fourth century C.E.

According to Josephus, there was a temple of Isis in Rome at the time of Pilate; Caesar Tiberius destroyed the temple of Isis and threw Isis' statue into the river Tiber to punish the priests of Isis for something wrong they had done.⁸⁶ The fact that at about the time of the fall of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) Isis appeared on Greek and Roman coins signifies that this religion was prevalent.⁸⁷ Isis later became identified with the Greek goddess Artemis. When Paul preached in Ephesus she was popular there too. In Acts 19:23-40, the Ephesian craftsmen who made miniature temples of Artemis-Isis started a riot against Paul because Paul's preaching was damaging their business.

Osiris, identified with Sarapis during the Hellenistic era, was the god and king of the underworld while his posthumous son Horus was the god and king of the living.⁸⁸ Osiris mummified represented resurrection into eternal life. His body was customarily

⁸⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 18, 3-4.

⁸⁷ Benson, *Origins*, 187.

⁸⁸ The myth of Isis and Osiris occurs also in Plutarch's *Moralia: Isis and Osiris*, 364-65.

wrapped in white funeral clothes. As known, in the New Testament white clothes are the clothes of the righteous. Resurrection was the main theme of the religion of Isis. Also, being born again refers to a mystical death for the initiate that was followed by a spiritual birth.⁸⁹ They believed in the symbolism of the seed that has to be buried and has to die for a new plant to spring up with more seeds. This idea is comparable with John 12:24: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Paul also says to those who did not believe resurrection: “Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (I Cor 15:36, NRSV). Further distinctive features, in connection with Christianity, should be mentioned. The initiates of the mysteries of Isis were expected to confess their sins before their initiation. The confession was commonly a part of the initiation ceremony. They believed that the rite of baptism would wash away all initiate’s confessed sins and from then on his or her life would be changed for the better. In the Book of Revelation, some motifs such as a fire-red dragon, a flying woman with two wings of a great eagle, and the identity of Jesus who is, and who was, and who is to come, are the parallels with the myth of Isis. It deserves to be noticed that Revelation was written somewhere in Asia Minor, either at Ephesus or the island of Patmos, which is across from Ephesus, which was a major center for the religion of Isis-Artemis.⁹⁰

Apuleius depicts the experience of initiation as an experience of darkness, death, and rebirth. Though not every version of the myth is identical, this myth suggests

⁸⁹ Benson, 187.

⁹⁰ Benson, 189.

significant features in portraying Osiris, as a saving deity dies, experiences a resurrection accompanied by water baptism. It is strikingly parallel with Pauline understanding of baptism, which includes sharing the experience of a dying and rising savior. Finally, like Isis, Mary was conventionally presented as a blessed mother who was often portrayed with her son Jesus sitting formally on her lap just as Horus sits on the lap of Isis.⁹¹

The Mysteries of Attis

The Phrygian (Anatolian) mysteries of Cybele are rooted in the fierce religious traditions of ancient Phrygia. In 204 B.C.E., the goddess was welcomed into Rome, and thereafter the worship of her was prominent in the Roman world.⁹² The worship of the Great Mother Cybele in Rome, along with the worship of the goddess Isis (the mother of Horus) in Rome, played a key role in inspiring the worship of Mary (the mother of Jesus) by the Catholic Church of Rome. In the myth, the Anatolian god Attis was identified with the Phoenician god Adonis. It had been believed that not only Adonis died and was resurrected but also an initiate had to take part in the dying and rising of the god Attis.⁹³

⁹¹ Marvin W. Meyer, "Mystery Religions," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 944.

⁹² Meyer, "Mystery Religions," 943.

⁹³ According to a myth, Attis was a very handsome shepherd with whom the goddess Cybele fell in love. Attis betrayed her and entered into a love affair with a nymph. In her anger and jealousy Cybele killed the nymph. This caused Attis to go insane and kill himself. Cybele, who still loved Attis, mourned for him and resurrected him. This myth was introduced to later generations by Firmicus Maternus, who became a

According to the mysteries, Attis went to the sanctuary that was in a dark cavern. He was symbolically slain and buried into the ground up to his neck. Then the congregation of the cult sang songs of mourning over the victim while in the dark. Suddenly, the cavern became illuminated by a bright light and the mystic priest called in a low voice to rejoice.⁹⁴ By this ritual, the initiate who was buried became the god Attis during his initiation and, like Attis, the initiate symbolically suffered torments, was killed, and rose again. Those motifs are found in the New Testament (Col 2:12; Gal 2:20; Rom 8:17). Each spring the followers of Cybele would mourn for the dead Attis in acts of fasting and flagellation. During the Roman celebrations of the spring festival a resurrection was celebrated. It seems likely that this religion preceded Christianity, though whether the baptismal rites did also is uncertain.

The Mysteries of Mithra

The ancient Roman religion known as the Mithraic mysteries has captivated the imaginations of scholars for generations.⁹⁵ Like the other ancient mystery religions, Mithraism maintained strict secrecy about its teachings and practices, revealing them

Christian in the 4th century C.E. (*The Error of the Pagan Religions*). See also Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult*, trans. by A. M. H. Lemmers (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

⁹⁴ Firmicus Maternus, *Error of the Pagan Religions*, 22.1.

⁹⁵ See David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Kurt Rudolph, "Mitra, Mithra, Mithras," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 74 (1979): 309-20; Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 200-02.

only to initiates. Due to the cult's secrecy, almost no literary evidence about the beliefs of Mithraism remains. A more difficult problem for the study of this religion is that the few texts that refer to the cult do not come from Mithraic devotees themselves, but rather from outsiders such as early Church fathers, who mentioned Mithraism in order to attack it, and Platonic philosophers, who attempted to find support in Mithraic symbolism for their own philosophical ideas. Although literary sources for Mithraism are extremely sparse, an abundance of material evidence for the cult exists in the many Mithraic temples and artifacts that archaeologists have found scattered throughout the Roman Empire, from England in the north and west to Palestine in the south and east. Of greater significance is that Mithraism arose in the Mediterranean world in the century before the rise of Christianity. It became early Christianity's most serious rival, and thus, the study of the cult can shed vital light on the cultural dynamics that led to the rise of Christianity. The earliest references to the Mithraic mysteries are to be found in Plutarch's account of certain raiders who celebrated secret rites of Mithras.⁹⁶ Men attracted to Mithras, particularly soldiers, sailors, and imperial officers, entered the Mithraea, sanctuaries of Mithras, in order to participate in initiatory rituals and other ceremonies. Women could not join Mithraism. Tertullian spells out lustrations, ordeals, and tests of valor in which initiates participated,⁹⁷ and Justin Martyr refers to holy Mithraic meals in which initiates

⁹⁶ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives: Pompey*, 24.1-8. Note that Pompey conquered Palestine in 63 B.C.E.

⁹⁷ Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, 40.

took bread and a cup of water and uttered certain formulae.⁹⁸ Josephus recounts the speech of the Roman general Titus during the siege of Jerusalem, who, in his exhortation to his soldiers, spoke about life after death.⁹⁹

Although Mithraism predates Christianity, it is difficult to discern Mithra's influence on Christianity. To some extent the common beliefs of the two religions may have been the result of interdependence. But such beliefs existed before the establishment of either religion and were widespread in the eastern Mediterranean. The study of Mithraism confirms the widespread religious syncretism of the Roman era. There are, however, striking similarities between Mithraism and Christianity. Mithra's birthday was December 25th. He was the god of light in the myth. After December 25th the length of each day begins to increase. Thus, December 25 was regarded as the day of the rebirth of the god Sol (Sun) and of the renovation of life. Hellenistic Christians borrowed this date and declared it as Jesus' birthday. Moreover, some inscriptions from the Mithraea provide a soteriological interpretation such as rebirth and creation.¹⁰⁰ One may sense a profound kinship between Mithraism and Christianity.

Early Christianity in Its Hellenistic Context

Christianity started and developed within a religious context that included the

⁹⁸ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 66.

⁹⁹ Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.1.5.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer, "Mystery Religions," 944.

mystery religions. The early Church showed obvious similarities to the mysteries.¹⁰¹ Christianity is a religion of salvation and personal voluntary choice, and, like the devotees of the mysteries, Christian initiates underwent such ceremonial rituals as purification, fasting, and baptism in order to be admitted to the community. This practice is not found in early Judaism. By eating the bread and drinking the wine as the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, Christians participated in the passion of Christ, and assimilated the saving power of the Cross into their lives. Paul explains the mystery of the death and resurrection of people by comparing it to the planting and sprouting of a seed (1 Cor 15:36-38) in a manner reminiscent of the Eleusinian mysteries. In the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus' performing the sign of changing water to wine is narrated (John 2:1-11) like a miracle commonly associated with Dionysus.

Of course, careless conclusions about dependence or connection of mysteries should be avoided when describing Christian theology. An important thing, however, is that religions often appropriated themes from each other in the syncretistic milieu of the Mediterranean world. It is quite possible that such a relationship may have existed between early Christianity and the mystery religions, to which Christian ministers tried to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is basically a mystery, as Paul understands.

Ancient and modern interpreters have tried to account for these similarities between the mystery religions and early Christianity by proposing theories of dependence.

¹⁰¹ J. H. Randall, *Hellenistic Ways of Deliverance and the Making of the Christian Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); Jocelyn Godwin, *Mystery Religion in the Ancient World* (San Francisco: San Francisco Harper, 1981).

Early Christian writers like Justin Martyr and Tertullian explained that similarities between Christianity and Mithraism were due to demonic imitation of true Christianity. Some modern scholars have described with varying interpretations the links between mystery rituals and those of Christianity, during its first centuries.¹⁰² In Pauline Churches, in particular, the fundamental change in performing and interpreting the baptismal rite occurred in the context of the Gentile mission under the increasing influence of Greco-Roman culture, in particular the mystery cults. According to Apuleius, for example,

¹⁰² Those who argue of an absolute dependence include Gunkel, C. Schneider, Brandon, Holtzmann, Loisy, Reitzenstein, J. H. Randall, and Joselyn Godwin. Also, there are many scholars who admit the significant parallels between Paul and the mysteries but emphasize the elements of contradictions. Bousset, Dibelius, Oepke, and Bultmann pay attention to the modification of adopted ideas from the mysteries. Wilkenhauser, Barrett, Bornkamm, and Schnackenburg concede a terminological dependence, while Kittel, and Cullmann say there is a formal analogy with the mysteries, with an echo of the language.

A number of scholars believe that a dependence of Paul on the mysteries is impossible, pointing out the differences that separate the Pauline idea from the world of the mysteries. They stress that Paul's theology is founded upon the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and this marks it off from all other religions, mainly because Paul's baptism is connected with historical Christ-event. For arguments against a direct influence of the mystery religions on Paul are found seen from R. E. O. White, *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation: A Theology of Baptism and Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960); Arthur Darby Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (NY: Harper & Row, 1964), 109-45; Ronald H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984; reprint, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, Richardson, Tex.: Probe Books, 1992), 115-59; Günter Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries: The Problem of the Pauline Doctrine of Baptism in Romans VI. 1-11, in the Light of its Religio-Historical Parallels*, translated by J. P. Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967); Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection*; James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 38A (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 310.

While arguing against a direct intellectual influence of mystery religions on Pauline theology, many scholars have attempted to solve the problem of irresistible parallels found in the Pauline understanding of baptism and the rites of the mystery cults by using the idea of Paul's employment as unconscious or unintentional. There are scholars who accept a mere terminological dependence of Paul on the mystery religions.

there was a bath, a baptism, a sprinkling with drops of a holy and sanctifying liquid. It is the “bath of cleansing and life, a rebirth (ἀναγέννησις), and the person baptized is the one reborn.”¹⁰³ One may also remind of the Egyptian royal baptism in which the individual drops were identified as symbols of life and power. According to *P. Paris* 47¹⁰⁴ (*UPZ* I.70; *Sel. Pap.* I.100), baptism existed in the Isis/Sarapis cult. Moreover, this text dates the link between death and baptism to a much earlier date. This papyrus suggests that baptism either associated with salvation or associated with death, or that the consequence of prematurely partaking of baptism is death. Similarly, in the Hellenistic documents, σωτηρία, salvation in this life as well as in the life beyond, was already connected with the baptism in holy water.¹⁰⁵

The Hellenistic Church understood baptism as analogous to the initiation rituals of the mystery religions.¹⁰⁶ Christianity preserves the Pauline accounts in which he is using the familiar images of “being baptized into Christ’s death” (Rom 6:3) or “being buried by baptism with Christ in death” (Rom 6:4), which can also be found in all the mystery religions. One may therefore conclude that Christian writers used Hellenistic ideas and language from other cults and literatures in order to express their own beliefs,

¹⁰³ Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 100.

¹⁰⁴ *P. Paris* is a mid-second century B.C.E. letter from Apollonius, an official at the Serapeum in Memphis, to his brother Ptolemaeus, whom he addresses as “father,” as Mithras was to Lucius in Apuleius.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, translated by John E. Steely (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1978), 41.

¹⁰⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I*, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1951), 140-44.

in an environment of syncretistic religions.¹⁰⁷ Adapting certain terms, concepts, and forms of speech, they sometimes altered and modified the religious conceptions in terms of their own theological criteria. For gentile Christians, it is not difficult to understand a baptism into Christ as being incorporated into the body of Christ and having some form of union with him. These notions must be compared with initiation rituals as they are found in many mystery religions. For this reason, the Greco-Roman rituals “cannot be dismissed merely as pagan superstition,”¹⁰⁸ because they offered a very personalized experience and a revelation that changed consciousness, and opened the mind and feelings to the transcendental. The core of the rite was a unification of the worshipper with deity in a way not otherwise possible, i.e., a mystical union or bond. This experience touched upon the deepest issues of life and death, whether in nature or in the individual man. Cicero wrote of Eleusis: “we have not only received the way and manner of a joyful life, but also have learnt to die with a better hope.”¹⁰⁹

Summary

¹⁰⁷ Scholars argue that Hellenization took place prior to Paul. See Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginning of Christianity to Irenaeus*, translated by J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (Berlin: Toepelmann, 1967).

¹⁰⁸ See John St. John, “The Sacred Meal,” 55.

¹⁰⁹ Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.14.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the Qumranites and John the Baptist practiced baptism before the early Christians. John was in many ways similar to the Qumranites. He lived like the Qumran people and preached similarly. The Gospel of Mark does not indicate that John the Baptist baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” John was not a Christian, yet Mark implies that the sins of his converts were forgiven (Mk 1:4). Josephus, too, writes that John the Baptist urged the Jews to baptize for the remission of sins and the purification of the soul. Baptism for the forgiveness of sins was an established practice before Jesus. The earliest form of Christian baptism is borrowed from John the Baptist. Early Christians, like the mystery followers, conducted baptism at the time of initiation. Peter ordered baptism as soon as they repented (Act 2:38). In this sense, Christianity was not isolated from pre-existing beliefs. Whereas the mystery religions were not competing with one another, only Christianity prohibited its converts from belonging to other religions. This prohibition was not a problem in the beginning, but when Christians grew in numbers years later the other religions became offended by Christianity’s competitiveness and its lack of sharing. As a result, they started persecuting the Christians. Along with the other mystery religions, however, Mithraism later suffered persecution by Christianity. After Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the state religion, Mithraism was gradually eliminated.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Benson, *Origins*, 191.

CHAPTER 4

JESUS' BAPTISM IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus' baptism by John appears to have embarrassed many Christians in the early Church: Why would Jesus need a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"? Each Evangelist tries to handle this critical issue in distinctive ways. Nathan Mitchel summarizes effectively how all the Gospels portray the event of Jesus' baptism.¹ First of all, Mark shows the least embarrassment, so he includes the reference to Jesus' baptism by John as one aimed at repentance and the remission of sins (Mk 1:4).² Matthew does not want to repeat Mark 1:4 but introduces an apologia for Jesus' behavior (Mt 3:14-15). When Jesus came to be baptized to John, the baptizer hesitated (Mt 3:13-14). Jesus urged him to proceed because he had come as the servant of the Lord to do his will which included identifying himself with the people he had come to save from their sins. According to Matthean tradition, it is the blood of Jesus, not John's baptism, which forgives sins (Mt 26:28). People were being immersed by John as an expression of their repentance and desire for forgiveness. Jesus was also being baptized in preparation for the saving ministry as the greater One who was to come to purify them with a baptism of the Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Jesus stood among them because they were typical

¹ Nathan Mitchel, "Baptism in the Didache" in *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History and Transmission*, edited by Clayton N. Jefford (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 242-43.

² Ibid.

of the people he had come to save. Their submission to John's baptism identified them as part of the true people of God awaiting their redeemer. The real significance of Jesus' baptism by John in Matthew is that there is "a connection between baptism and righteousness"³ and that baptism opened a path of righteousness (Mt 21:32) on which even sinners and prostitutes could approach the Kingdom of God (the "Kingdom of heaven" in Matthew). In Matthew 3:11-14 John realized the true identity of Jesus (as the Messiah) either prior to the actual baptism, or from the baptism onward, though after the Baptism John sends his disciples to ask if Jesus is the Messiah (Mt 11:2-3). In Matthew, the purpose of John's baptism was to reveal Jesus to Israel. Luke places the Spirit at the center of the scene, and so the actual baptism of Jesus by John becomes uncharacteristic (Lk 3:21-22).

The Fourth Gospel completely does not mention the actual event of Jesus' baptism and instead substitutes it with John's confessional exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). Jesus needs no baptism in this Gospel. Surprisingly, Jesus is a baptizer. So John, who is known in the Christian tradition as the Baptist, is not called John the Baptist but always simply John. Though he is baptizing (1:28, 31; 3:23; 10:42), the title ὁ βαπτίζων ("the baptizer," 1:33) is reserved for Jesus.⁴ The more significant

³ John Nolland, "'In Such a Manner It is Fitting for us to Fulfill all Righteousness': Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSS 171 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999), 65-66.

⁴ J. Ramsey Michales, "Baptism and Conversion in John: A Particular Baptist Reading" in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary*

thing concerning the relationship John the Baptist and Jesus is that John is not the forerunner, as in the Synoptics, because Jesus is pre-existent and has no need of prefigure. One must admit that neither the practice of baptism nor its interpretation was uniform in the Gospels, mainly because the Christology they have is diverse. This chapter investigates how the Evangelists dealt with the baptism of John, especially in relation to Jesus.

Did Jesus Require Baptism for Remission of Sins?

That Jesus was baptized by John has been a problem from the beginning of Christianity, because his being baptized indicated that he might have been subordinate to John⁵ on the one hand and that Jesus had something negative for which he should have repented, on the other. Examining carefully the New Testament sources, they indicate that the practice of baptism and its meaning in early Churches do not occur in a “harmonious and unified way.”⁶ John immersed folks who penitently confessed their sins (Mk 1:5) because his baptism was “for the remission of sins” (Mk 1:4). One of the

Studies in Honor of R. E. O. White, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSS 171 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999), 136-39.

⁵ John E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 261-64.

⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, “Transferring a Ritual: Paul’s Interpretation of baptism in Romans 6,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 103. In the article Betz interprets Paul’s baptismal theology with a conclusion that it is not identical even in Paul’s Epistles, for example, in Gal 3:26-28, I Cor 1:13-17 and Rom 6:1-11.

perennial points of discussion about Jesus' baptism is its relationship to the forgiveness of sins. The Greek prepositional phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν in Mark 1:4 (cf. εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν in Acts 2:38) has been hotly debated by New Testament exegetes because of its significance for the issue.

Why was Jesus baptized at the hands of John the Baptist? This is not a question to which many can give a clear and convincing answer. Several opinions have been offered. One is that it was to identify Jesus as the Son of God at the beginning of his ministry. This interpretation stems from the Gospel of Mark, which describes Jesus inaugurating his official ministry right after the baptism. To fulfill the traditional expectation, Christ had to be formally inaugurated into the public ministry of his offices through the John's prophetic announcement. For this purpose he came to John (Mk 1:9), who was the representative of "the Law and the Prophets" (cf. Lk 16:16). It was, however, not only a commencement token of the total dedication of Jesus in carrying out divine plan but also fundamentally an act of obedience to the Father. This is the Matthean view of John's baptism, through which Jesus fulfills God's righteousness. According to the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist refused at first to give his baptism to Jesus, for John could not understand what Jesus had to do with the baptism of repentance. On his own account, Jesus did not approach John seeking pardon. A dogmatic issue of the forgiveness of sins is separated from the scene of baptism. D. A. Carson explains, "Jesus' submission to John demonstrates his willingness to take on the servant's role, entailing his identification with the people."⁷ According to Beasley-

⁷ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 8, edited by F. E.

Murray, the Messiah was supposed to begin his ministry by identifying himself with their need,⁸ claiming that “every strand of messianic teaching in the Old Testament depicts the Messiah as inseparable from his people.”⁹ That is why, as the Gospel of Luke portrays, Jesus came “with the people” to be baptized (Lk3:21). Jesus stood among them because they were typical of the people he had come to save. In this interpretation the issue whether Jesus was sinful or not is neglected.

There are scholars who attempt to interpret Jesus’ baptism as a visual precursor to his ultimate death, burial, and resurrection, which would occur year(s) later. Following this perspective, the whole of Jesus’ ministry was explained in the term “baptism.” Flemington supports this interpretation by claiming that “behind Christian baptism stands the baptism, unique and all-inclusive, undertaken by Jesus himself for the sins of the world.”¹⁰ Oscar Cullmann, C. E. B. Cranfield and J. A. T. Robinson connect Jesus’ baptism with John’s account in Mark 10:38 (and Lk 12:50) where Jesus links his baptism with the cross.¹¹ Cullmann, in particular, interprets the passage through Isaiah’s Servant Songs (Ch. 42, 52, and 53). This interpretation reflects the proclamation of John the

Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 108.

⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 57.

⁹ Beasley-Murray, 57.

¹⁰ Willaim. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1948), 72.

¹¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1950), 16-19; Cranfield, 52; John A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM, 1984), 162.

Baptist preserved only in the Fourth Gospel, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). From this point of view, Jesus’ baptism was a salvific act, just as his act of becoming incarnate into the world, which is dark and evil though he is the Light, though he is divine (Jn 1: 1-18). In the Epistle to the Philippians, Jesus is portrayed as one who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7).

A group of Baptist scholars attempts to interpret favorably the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν (Acts 2:38), claiming that the Greek preposition εἰς meant “because of.” According to them, the prepositional phrase meant that baptism was exercised because one’s sins were already forgiven after repentance was offered.¹² The prime purpose of this interpretation is to advocate the sinlessness of Jesus; accordingly, Jesus’ approach to John was not to ask forgiveness. This interpretation, however, is theologically and linguistically unacceptable. This view contradicts the originally intended purpose of the rite, for it presupposes the forgiveness of sins for the baptized. Furthermore, even if their interpretation is adequate, it could logically mean that Jesus was a still sinner before baptism. Matthew 26:28 reads that Jesus’ blood was to be shed εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. It never means that Jesus died “because” human sins were already forgiven. In Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3, John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. It certainly does not imply that John’s preaching

¹² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 369-71.

about the baptism of repentance was given because the sins of his audience were already forgiven.

R. Bradshaw sums up nicely the opposite opinion.¹³ Major, Manson, and Wright, faced with the account of Jesus submitting himself to a baptism of repentance, put the event down to Jesus' consciousness of his own sin.¹⁴ In Bultmann's expression, "Jesus becomes the Son of God by the Spirit conferred upon him at the baptism."¹⁵ Dibelius holds that that was the original thrust of the Q saying.¹⁶ According to this explanation the earliest Evangelist simply did not realize that in the baptism he implied that Jesus was a sinner. Supporting evidence for this can be found in the *Gospel of the Nazareans*, wherein Jesus refuses his mother's invitation to be baptized by John with the retort "wherein have I sinned that I should go and be baptized by him?"¹⁷ This statement presupposes that Jesus needed to be baptized because he was a sinner who was in need of repentance. It was certainly unpopular because of its denigration of the integrity of

¹³ Robert I. Bradshaw, "The Significance of the Baptism of Jesus for the Person of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels," <http://www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/baptism.pdf>.1990.

¹⁴ Henry D. A. Major, Thomas W. Manson, and Charles J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus: An Exposition of the Gospels in the Light of Modern Research* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1938), 21.

¹⁵ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 131.

¹⁶ Martin Dibelius, *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1961), 270-74.

¹⁷ James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1990), 15.

Christ; one reason the *Gospel of the Nazareans* edited the story of Jesus' baptism was to counter such a claim.¹⁸

In the background of the exegetical confusion in understanding the historical baptism of Jesus is Adoptionist Christology. Some Christians in the early Church viewed the baptism as an act of adoption based upon the presupposition that Jesus' life was understood in ancient Israelite messianic terms. The old Israelite conception was that the king became the Son of God at his coronation (Ps 2), i.e., as an adult, at the point of a new commissioning. Explaining the adoptionistic element in early Christianity's Christology, James Edward argues, "The earliest stratum of the *kerygma*, as it is represented in Acts 2:36, 13:13, and Rom 1:4, implies that Jesus was first exalted to the status of Son of God either at the resurrection or ascension."¹⁹ This understanding was subsequently transposed unto Jesus' earthly life and ministry by the early Church, resulting in such passages as Luke 1:32-35, John 1:1-2, Philippians 2:6-7; Hebrew 13:8; Revelation 1:8. This perspective is not preferred by many scholars who have claimed that at the resurrection Jesus received the rightful honor and glory that he had not known as the Son of God in his humiliation.²⁰ An adoptionistic understanding of Jesus' baptism

¹⁸ Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*, 14-15.

¹⁹ James R. Edward, "The Baptism of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 55.

²⁰ For the scholars who reject the adoptionist theory, see: W. C. Allen, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, 3rd ed., (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989), 28; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 51; William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Greek Testament

is excluded, however, even in Matthew and Luke,²¹ in which Jesus is witnessed to be the Son of God from birth. The same is true in the Fourth Gospel by its Christology of pre-existence and incarnation. Church fathers rejected Adoptionist Christology as well. Adoptionism is probable only in Mark's account of baptism (1:11), where the proclamation of the divine Son-ship is manifested at the end of his earthly life by the centurion's confession at the crucifixion (15:39).

In order to avoid the serious confusion in claiming the identity of Jesus, the Gospel of Matthew, while inheriting the Markan tradition, added verses (3:14-15) as an editorial comment for the readers in the community. Luke avoids an embarrassing scene, which would make Jesus seem like an inferior figure to John, just as a disciple of John the Baptist. Evidently, the scriptures reflecting the notion of Jesus' sinlessness (Acts 3:14; II Cor.5:21; Heb. 4:15 and I Pet. 2:22, etc) were seen as a later idea.²² While the canonical Gospels (except Mark) are unwilling to describe Jesus' baptism as a baptism for forgiveness of sins, the non-canonical Christian sources omit, if they are not ignorant of, the account. They probably found it embarrassing to confess that Jesus the Son of God was subordinating himself to John and undergoing a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. As the investigation above shows, diverse forms of baptismal accounts in each Gospel enable one to perceive valuable insights into their different Christology.

Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 58; Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York: Harper, 1960), 68.

²¹ Nevertheless, one may consider the Lucan textual variant (Manuscript *D*) of 3:22 in which the idea of adoption would be difficult to avoid: "Today I have begotten you." This is a citation of Ps 2:7 and is found also in Heb 5:5.

²² Major, Manson, and Wright, 22-23.

Was Jesus ὁ βαπτίζων (Jn 3:22, 26; 4:1) with the Holy Spirit (1:33)?

One of the distinctive features in studying the baptism of John would be that John the Baptist did not baptize at all “in the name of Jesus.” John announces instead, according to Luke, that Jesus “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Oscar Cullmann suggests that the real difference between John’s baptism and Christian baptism is that the latter conveyed the Spirit.²³ This position has been supported by many scholars, including James Dunn.²⁴ On closer examination, however, this would hardly seem to be justified because there are Christian baptisms without the Spirit; moreover, the Spirit can come without baptism. Sometimes the Spirit is bestowed prior to baptism (Act 9:18; 10:45), while on two occasions the gift of the Spirit comes after the baptismal act (Act 8:12; 19:5). There is hardly any relationship at all between the two, because the Spirit does not limit itself to baptism. Thus the reception of the Spirit is dependent not only upon baptism but also upon repentance and faith. Some scholars have maintained that John’s original characterization of the future baptism spoke only of fire, i.e. judgment (Mt 3:10-13; Lk 3:9-17), and the Holy Spirit was substituted in the light of the early Christians’ experience.²⁵ The logion (Mt 3:11; Lk 3:16) is considered as a

²³ Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 10.

²⁴ See Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press, 1970). His main argument is that in the New Testament the outpouring of the Spirit is an event clearly distinct and separate from water baptism.

²⁵ For example, Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St Mark*, 2nd ed.

prophecy that speaks of a double lustration: baptism with the Holy Spirit is for those who repented; baptism with fire is punishment for the unrepentant.

In all the Gospels, John the Baptist once predicts that the Coming One (his successor), Jesus, will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:8; Jn 1:33), or the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk 3:16=Mt 3:11). In the Fourth Gospel there are more attestations of Jesus' baptizing ministry, while the Baptist is still active. One is from John's disciples, that "Jesus is baptizing" (3:26); the other comes from Pharisees, "Jesus is making and baptizing disciples" (4:1). But the Evangelist disclaims the idea that Jesus baptized, writing, "It was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized" (4:2). New Testament scholarship recognizes that Jesus did not perform baptism, at least in the Synoptics. Even when Jesus is presented as the baptizer in the Gospel of John, the description does not regard Jesus' baptism as different from that of John. As mentioned, this information is immediately corrected by the Evangelist in 4:2, and this correction is proved by an account that there was no Spirit until Jesus was glorified after exaltation (Jn 7:39). The link between the baptism and the Holy Spirit is not easily maintained in Jesus' ministry. Instead, readers meet the resurrected Christ who promises the eleven disciples the power to receive the Holy Spirit, who comes upon them and makes them his universal witnesses (Act 1:8). The promise is realized on Pentecost, when participants receive a multi-lingual gift. The spiritual gift, *glossolalia*, is necessary for Christians who perform their special mission for Gentiles. The historical Jesus may not have been interested in performing baptism in his ministry, at least in his earthly life. Though in the Fourth Gospel the title ὁ

(London: Macmillian, 1965), 157.

βαπτίζων (Jn 1:33) is reserved for Jesus, and not for John who is known as the Baptist, many scholars are unwilling to accept as historical the notice that Jesus was a baptizer, as disclaimed in John 4:2. If Jesus did baptize, information about specific locations and reasons would have been provided in the Gospels, as given for John the Baptist.

Baptism as Dying with Christ (Mk 10:38-39)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Mark 10:38-39 is a passage in which baptism, along with Eucharist, refers to Jesus' death. In this saying, Jesus and his followers are clearly connected by means of Jesus' most important event in his life for his followers. Jesus' drinking a cup and being baptized which refer to his death in suffering are what his disciples ought to participate in order to follow Jesus with self-denial and their own cross (Mk 8:34), and thus "the baptism is seen as a dying in relation to the dying of Christ."²⁶ The importance of the baptismal account in Mark may be further strengthened by the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, which is said to be located, by Clement of Alexandria, in this section of canonical Mark.²⁷ Morton Smith suggests that the pericope

²⁶ Robin Scroggs and Kent I. Groff, "Baptism in Mark: Dying and Rising with Christ," *JBL* 92 (1973): 537.

²⁷ The *Secret Gospel of Mark* seems a fragment of an early edition of the Mark, discovered in 1958 by Professor Morton Smith who found it quoted in a letter that had been written by a bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, at the end of the second century. From this document, we can still see a trace of earlier story that is neither fully developed nor explicitly acknowledged in the canonical texts. For more information with insightful explanation by an expert, see Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

of Mark 10:13-45 is for the Pascal vigil in Clement's Church, in which the vigil refers to an all-night service preceding Easter day when the baptisms were performed.²⁸ In Mark 14:51-52, there is "a young man"²⁹ (νεανίσκος) who has followed Jesus to his trial, though unnamed, unlike the other disciples, including the three renamed disciples, who fled. When Jesus is arrested, the young man escapes by shedding his linen garment and fleeing naked. Surprisingly enough, he reappears at the empty tomb of Jesus in the morning of the Easter, clothed in a "white robe" (Mk 16:5). The Eleusinian initiates, Dionysians and Orphics, wore white garments to avoid the place of punishment after death and go to the better world. This belief is not found anywhere in pre-exilic Judaism. The Qumranites were known to wear white garments, emphasize celibacy, and live an ascetic life-style. During his transfiguration, Jesus' clothes became "exceedingly

²⁸ Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 167-88.

²⁹ Remarkably, The *Gospel of Mark* contains the account of νεανίσκος (a young man) who was raised from the dead.

"And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightaway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb, they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do, and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan" (Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 446-47).

dazzling white” (Mk 9:3). According to Revelation, the elders in Heaven wear white garments (Rev 4:4, etc), as do the souls of the martyrs (Rev 6:9-11).

The mention of linen, nudity,³⁰ and a white robe in sequence, along with the notice of evening and morning,³¹ has a symbolic meaning that would refer to a rite of initiation. Apart from the short narrative of the mysterious young man, the only other mention of linen in the Gospel of Mark is the linen used to wrap the dead body of Jesus. As metaphor of baptism, the reference to nudity and new clothing is implied in several Christian texts: the *Gospel of Philip* 123:21-25, *Acts of Thomas* (121, 133, 157), and *Gospel of Thomas* (37). The *Secret Gospel of Mark* could support the idea that the young man in canonical Mark symbolizes a nocturnal initiate, for he is pictured naked and his body is covered only by linen. In the story of Mark, this unnamed young man is conscientiously compared to Jesus’ disciples, in particular, the renamed characters Peter (3:16) and Boanerges (3:17). Peter is not able to keep his promise, which involves dying with Jesus (14:31). He recognizes that he fails when the rooster crows in the early morning. The young man, however, follows Jesus, unlike Peter who followed Jesus “at a

³⁰ The mention of nudity has occasioned some response, and requires further explanation. Nudity was a byproduct of the need to change one’s garments from the believer’s everyday clothing to the white garment that was worn by the newly baptized. In those days people did not have underwear as we know it, and among the lower socio-economic strata from which the Church drew a large proportion of its converts, many people probably did not have extra sets of clothing to wear into the baptismal pool. It was the white garment that was symbolic. Looking at the Scriptural background for this, the white or linen robe was the garment of the righteous.

³¹ Meyer comments on nocturnal initiation: “Sometimes an initiate was described as one reborn who also saw the light. Nocturnal initiatory ceremonies, in which light and darkness were contrasted, made the primal experience of enlightenment” (*Ancient Mysteries*, 4-5).

distance” (14:54). In the earlier part of his Gospel, Mark informs readers that Jesus appointed twelve disciples to have them be with Jesus (3:14-5); nevertheless, not only Peter but all the other disciples deserted their Lord and escaped (14:50).

Sometimes, as in the Eleusinian and Egyptian mysteries of Isis,³² “the *mystai* underwent dramatic rituals of darkness and death and emerged afterward into new light and life.”³³ Plutarch’s observation that notes the similarity of two Greek verbs, *teleutan* (to die) and *teleisthai* (to be initiated) is introduced by Mayer. Further, he observes that “people who die and people who are initiated go through comparable transformations.”³⁴ In several texts the initiates are specifically declared to be reborn, especially in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* (Book 11) and a Mithraic inscription from Santa Prisca on the *taubolium* and *criobolium* (the bath in the blood of a bull or a ram).³⁵ The similarities between initiations into mystery cults and Christian baptism are striking.

In Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus and the notion of rebirth are combined in 1 Peter 1:3b: “By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through

³² Lucius, the man trapped in the body of an ass, having suffered enough, sees in Isis his hope of release. A mystery initiation is typified in his transformation back into a man. He ritually purifies himself by bathing in the sea, and is transformed back into a man. After this he is found naked, and then is clothed in white linen and said to be born (Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, 272-73). His old friends gather to welcome him back as from the underworld (Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, 275). See, Jack Lindsay, *Apuleius: The Golden Ass* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); John Gwyn Griffiths trans. *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI)* by Apuleius of Madauros, EPRO 39 (Leiden: Beill, 1975).

³³ Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (NRSV). Along with the Isis cult, the baptismal liturgy preserved in Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* deserves special attention. According to this text, baptism reenacts the weekend commemorating Christ’s death and resurrection. Those who are set apart to be baptized are required to fast on Friday and Saturday (20:7), follow the vigil of instruction (20:9), and finally receive nude baptism after the cockcrow (21.1.3) that includes confessing the creed (20:12-18). The *Secret Gospel of Mark* contains an initiation involving nudity, new clothes, and dying and rising, as in Greco-Roman rituals that concern the hope of afterlife. Participation in or identification with Christ’s death sometimes has been regarded as a descent to Hades with him. This descent signifies the concept of victory over the power of opposing figures. A significant passage linking baptism with the conquering hero would be 1 Peter 3:18-22, in which Christ is said to have visited “the spirits in prison” during the time between his death and resurrection. The idea of a descent of Christ into Hades is not limited to these verses. It occurs also in Matthew 12:40 (“heart of the earth”), Acts 2:27, 31 (“Hades”), Rom 10:6-8 (“abyss”); Eph 4:8-10 (“lower parts of the earth”). Stories of the descent of deities into the underworld are found not only in the New Testament but also in the mystery religions.

The readers of the Gospel of Mark are hinted to recognize that the author portrays Jesus in a manner following the pattern of the Greek hero. The baptism in Mark 10:38-39 can be identified with death in terms of Jesus’ heroic career, that Jesus suffered and died. This passage has often been interpreted from the Christological viewpoints embedded in 1 Peter and Colossians: Jesus descended to Hades and then ascended out of

Hades overpowering the opposing authorities. According to Gregory Riley, the hero is known to be a figure of remarkable talent, such as Achilles or Alexander the Great, and the fate of the hero is interwoven with the fate of the hero's people.³⁶ Riley observes that "Common to all stories of heroes is the test of character." Heroes have rulers as human enemies; rulers abuse the hero and bring suffering on their cities, such as Troy and Thebes in Greek legend, or Jerusalem in Christian understanding.³⁷ Accordingly, "The hero suffers humiliation, privation, and even death as a kind of bait in a larger divine trap designed to catch and destroy the wicked."³⁸ Riley points out the example of Odysseus, whose wanderings eventually led to the destruction of the wicked suitors. The hero "dies painfully in the prime of life, in the midst of the very test, the crisis for which they were destined."³⁹ Through death the hero is transformed and then acts as an intermediary working on behalf of his or her worshipers who themselves pass the test.⁴⁰ In the stories of heroes, "they were models, examples, and ideals."⁴¹ Walter Burkert also writes: "The identification of the initiate with the fate of his god has been held to be the distinguishing characteristic of ancient mysteries."⁴² According to Bultmann, such a theology of baptism

³⁶ Riley, *One Jesus*, 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

is a “Hellenistic mystery idea” concerned with the dual interests of “conquest over death and the acquisition of life.”⁴³ Certain of the mysteries, which involve applying the benefits of descending and ascending to mortals, seem to emphasize both elements.

The claim that baptism is the means of participation in the work and life of Christ includes death (Mk 10:38-9) and the descent into Hades (1 Pet 3:19; 4:6). This interpretation was not lost on later Christian writers. As J. N. D. Kelly and F. Loofs indicate, by the second century the descent of Christ into Hades was a well-attested belief.⁴⁴ It was often mentioned by Ignatius of Antioch,⁴⁵ Polycarp,⁴⁶ Justin Martyr,⁴⁷ Irenaeus,⁴⁸ and Tertullian.⁴⁹ Chrysostom also states, referring to Paul’s teaching in Romans, “For the being baptized and immersed and then emerging, is a symbol of the Descent into Hades and return thence.”⁵⁰ Various myths throughout the ancient Near

⁴² Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 156.

⁴³ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 140.

⁴⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1960), 378-83; F. Loofs, “Descent to Hades,” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 4 (New York: Scribner, 1912), 654-63.

⁴⁵ *To the Magenesians* 9:2.

⁴⁶ *To the Philippians* 1:2.

⁴⁷ *Dialogue with Trypho* 72.

⁴⁸ *Against Heresies* 3.20.4; 4.22.1; 4.27.2; 5.31.1.

⁴⁹ *On the Soul* 55.

⁵⁰ Talbot W. Chambers ed., *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* in A Selected Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1, vol. 12 (New York; Scribner, 1889), 245.

East recount the descent of gods, heroes, and seers to the underworld to communicate with the dead or to retrieve loved ones or to battle the infernal forces.⁵¹ It seems likely that 1 Peter 3:19 contains material taken from an early Christian creed or hymn.⁵²

Not all scholars today agree that the passage in 1 Peter refers to the descent of Christ. A variety of views exists on the purpose of Christ's descent. Most early Christian authors thought that Christ descended in order to overthrow the kingdom of darkness, to preach to the Jews who died before Jesus, and to accomplish a great salvific work. Jesus is the suffering savior of the world, and his descent involves the defeat of the opposing powers (1 Pet 3:22; Eph 4:9; Enoch 9:10; 10:11-15). His heroic career is eventually memorialized in the Creed, especially at the time of the baptismal rite.⁵³ In the early Church, hymn and creeds played a significant role in the worship and instruction for Christian life. Numerous instances of hymnic or confessional formulas are found in Acts

⁵¹ R. J. Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, 145-54; "Spirits in Prison," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, 177-78.

⁵² Those who hold this view differ as to the limits of the quotation. Hans Windisch says the whole passage is a baptismal hymn. See *Die Katholischen Briefe*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 15 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1951), 70-73. Oscar Cullmann believes that verses 20 and 21^{a, b} are inserted into a confession of faith. See *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, trans. by J. K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 18-21. Frank L. Cross holds that the creed consists of verses 18, 21^c and 22. See *I Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London: Mowbray, 1954).

For further studies, see John. H. Elliott, *I Peter: New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 637-710; W. J. Dalton, "1 Peter 3:19 reconsidered," in W. C. Weinrich ed, *The New Testament Age*, vol. 1 (B. Reicke Festschrift; Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), 96-106; D. C. Dulling and Norman Perrin, "The First Letter of Peter and the Petrine School," in *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenesis, Myth and History* (3rd ed; Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 473-79.

⁵³ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 1960), 172-74.

8:37; Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 1:9; 15:3-8; Eph 4:4-6; 1 Tim 1:12, etc. There are more complete hymns or creeds: Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; Rev 4:11; 5:9-10.

Christians held the idea that Jesus' followers could partake of his victorious career and that the means of receiving these benefits was baptism, because through baptism Christians are identified with Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5). Through baptism, Christians are accorded the benefits of the conqueror, which include resurrection, the acquisition of immortality, and the renewal of life. This rite includes the notions of dying, bathing, rebirthing, and putting on new clothes. It enables one to maintain that early Christianity shared in a cultural milieu that understood that those who wanted to save their life must first lose it (Mk 8:35). Even though Christian baptism in the early Churches reflects Greco-Roman influence, many scholars are convinced that a Jewish background is the dominant influence on the Christian ritual of baptism. The evidence of baptism in nudity and nocturnal rites symbolizing death and new life, however, suggests that a significant impulse is coming from elsewhere. Christians' descent into water recalls their naked entry into life, as an imitation of Christ's nakedness on the cross and a sign that the old person has died and a new person now rises with him. Christ's career of descent into Hades, victory over its forces, and ascent out of Hades, are not the elements to be found in the Jewish background. Mark 10:38-39 reflects Greco-Roman ideas and motifs asking his followers to die with Christ.

CHAPTER 5

PAUL'S INTERPRETATION OF BAPTISM

One of the greatest problems in understanding Pauline theology is that his doctrine is unique in early Christianity. The claim that Pauline teaching is unique also applies to his baptismal theology. According to Acts 9:18, Paul was baptized, but where, by whom, or by what method he was baptized is never stated. He, on the contrary, sharply denies that baptizing converts is part of his missionary work: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor 1:17). Despite the complexity, baptism in Paul's teaching is quite important. In this chapter, relevant passages dealing with Pauline baptism will be examined. Paul's arguments in Rom 6:1-11, Gal 3:27-28, and 1 Cor 12:12-13 deserve to be treated in detail.

Being United with Christ: σύμφυτος and ὁμοίωμα (Rom. 6:1-11)

Rom 6:5 reads:

εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου
αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα·

The topic of Christ's death and resurrection appears in Rom 6:1–11, where it is part of Paul's argument in defense of the principle of justification by faith without following the law. His real or imagined opponents accuse him of holding that the law-

free gospel he preached meant that one could “remain in sin, in order that grace may abound” (3:8; 6:1, 15). Over and against this accusation Paul launches a complicated argument, which partly makes use of elements from a tradition which employs the theme of baptism associated with the idea of sin, as does John the Baptist. His thesis is that “we who died to sin” cannot “live in it” (6:2). Verse 5, in particular, is very important to figure out what Paul meant. There are two key terms to be clarified: σύμφυτος and ὁμοίωμα. The first term states the effect the ritual creates, while the second determines the relationship between the image of something and that something else. Exegetical problems in this verse focus on the second term ὁμοίωμα. One of the most controversial issues is whether verse 5 is describing the initiates’ being united with Christ’s death or whether it is alluding to their union with some other reality which is merely like Christ’s death. In other words, whether the word ὁμοίωμα is the outward form of Christ’s death itself or rather a likeness (or a form) of a reality is unsettled. If it alludes to the former, the implication would be that the initiate by being united to the form is united to Christ’s death. If the latter, ὁμοίωμα would mean a likeness or form of a reality and thus verse 5^a would refer to union for the believer with something which is like Christ’s death. There is a similar statement in Philippians 2:7, where Christ took the form of a servant, came into the world in the form of a man: ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος. In this passage the author of the hymn, if not Paul, shows that “Christ has undertaken a μεταμόρφωσις.”¹

¹ J. Schneider, “ὁμοίωμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*,

Unlike the scholars who have thought that Rom 6:1-11 is one of the best examples demonstrating the mystery religions' influence on Paul and early Christianity, some scholars have interpreted this passage from a different perspective.² Beasley-Murray, for instance, argues that, in Pauline baptismal theology, the Holy Spirit was essential in a baptism in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. He claims that Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3 shows that the cleansing and forgiveness of sins associated with baptism have been attributed to the power of Christ's death which has been confessed in baptism. According to Beasley-Murray, it is natural for Paul to connect baptism to the redemptive acts of Christ, so that he employs terms reminiscent of the primitive *kerygma*, that is, Christ died, was buried, and rose again. For scholars arguing against mystery influences, these are traditional Pauline phrases, not ones from the baptismal liturgies of the mystery religions.³ Baptism, argues Moo, is not a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, for dying and rising with Christ refers to the participation of the believer in the redemptive events, and because baptism is not the theme of the passage nor is it Paul's purpose to exposit his theology of baptism.⁴

vol.5, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated and abridged by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 197.

² Among them are G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); J. Fitzmyer, S. J., *Pauline Theology: A Brief Sketch* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967); James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, 38A (Dallas: Word Books, 1988).

³ See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 126-46.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 355.

The passage in Rom 6:1-11 is filled with terms that render the so-called σὺν Χριστῷ sense: 4^a συνετάφημεν, 5^{a, b} σύμφυτοι, 6^b συνεσταυρώθη, 8^a σὺν Χριστῷ, 8^b συζήσομεν αὐτῷ. The concept of σὺν here is definitely connected with Jesus, referring to his crucifixion, burial, and death. Paul's baptismal discourse is to be understood that the initiate's union with Christ is realized in his death, and this is experienced through the baptism. This idea is to be compared to a passage in Paul's other letter that employs a synonym: συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ (Phil 3:10^b).

Scholars have understood the phrase to refer to the believer's death to sin or the rite of baptism itself, interpreting ὁμοίωμα is a second reality like Christ's death, a reality that is somehow like that death.⁵ New Testament Scholarship is, however, by no means in agreement. The various interpretations can be divided into the categories according to which τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ is interpreted. Main scholarly opinions are the following: the form of Christ or his death,⁶ baptism of immersion and emersion analogous to dying and rising Christ,⁷ sacramental death implied in the rite of

⁵ See Florence A. Morgan, "Romans 6, 51: United to a Death like Christ's," *ETL* 59 (1983): 278.

⁶ Günter Bornkamm, "Taufe und Neues Leben: Röm 6," *Das Ende des Gesetzes* (München: Kaiser, 1952), 41-43; R. Schnackenburg, *Baptism*, 52-53; R. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ*, 35-39.

⁷ Paul's use of ὁμοίωμα is to indicate the rite of baptism, which could be called a likeness of Christ's death as immersion and emersion, symbolizing dying and rising with Christ. See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Black, 1957), 123-24; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (NY: Doubleday, 1993), 431, 434. Some exegetes emphasize the mystical character of the process indicated by the word ὁμοίωμα. Because

baptism,⁸ the Church as the body of Christ,⁹ or the Christian's death to sin.¹⁰ The phrase συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ refers to the believer's death insofar as it is a copy, likeness or image of Christ's.¹¹

Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27-28)

Gal 3:27 reads: ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσαθε.

It has been thought that the antecedents of Paul's statement of clothing oneself were the Old Testament. The argument is that the figure of changing clothes to represent an inward and spiritual change is very common in Old Testament, such as in Isa 51:9; 61:10, and Zec 3:3-5, where the symbol for the new life of righteousness and salvation is presented as changing clothes. They conclude that the metaphor of putting clothes on

Christ's death was the death on the cross, the person baptized dies this death (Rom 8:6, συνεσταυρώθη).

⁸ Verse 5 is understood as to speak of union between the believer's and Christ's death, which refers to the sacramental presence of Christ's death, a likeness of his historical death. See H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief: Kommentar* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 195-96; Schneider, "ὁμοίωμα," 191.

⁹ W. Schrage, "Ist die Kirche das 'Abbild seines Todes'? Zu Röm 6,5," in *Kirche: Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm*, edited by Dieter Lührmann and Georg Strecker (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), 211-19.

¹⁰ J. A. T. Robinson, *Wrestling with Romans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 70.

¹¹ Morgan, *Roman 6,5^a*, 300.

was familiar in the conventional language of Judaism, even though the practices of mysteries were known to Paul and early Christians.¹²

In contrast to the above mentioned interpretation, Gal 3:27-28 might be viewed as a good example for which mystery religions' influence on Paul's use of a metaphor "putting on Christ (Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε)" can be claimed. In Gal 3:27 Paul delivers the baptismal discourse: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (NRSV). The Pauline school also makes use of the "putting" figure in other places, such as in Col 3:9-10 and Eph 4:22-3, where the idea involves the assumption of a new way of life, whereas in Gal 3:27 there is a new status in Christ Jesus. The idea of "putting on" is also found in the Isis cult in which the initiate put on the robe of Osiris at the end of the initiation rite, so that the initiate became like Osiris after putting on the robe and received the worship of the community.¹³ In ancient religions, the initiate was helped into a new garment by the priest when he or she was initiated.¹⁴ Scholars also suggest that Paul associates the cleansing baths in the cults of Mithras with the level of moral efficacy, and the initiation ceremonies of Cybele cult with the concept

¹² See Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries*, 8.

¹³ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book XI. Meanwhile, those who claim the Pauline teaching as being familiar to the Jewish tradition have tried to find the themes in the Old Testament such as Job 8:22; Isa 61:10; Zech 3:3-5, etc. These passages are claimed as the best models for the New Testament employment of the symbol for the new life of righteousness and salvation.

¹⁴ The initiate in Isis cult puts on the robe of Osiris at the end of the baptismal rite. It is well presented in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (Book 11) in which the initiate becomes like Osiris after putting on the robe and receives the worship of the community.

of a rebirth.¹⁵ Furthermore, the mythology in the Thomas tradition identified the heavenly prototype of original man with a garment; as the soul returned home from darkness to the world of light it was clothed in the heavenly robe which came to meet it, and salvation was thereby attained.¹⁶ Paul uses the expression: “in Christ” and “Christ in us.” Paul’s language shows that baptism creates an interior relation and union with Christ that the person who is baptized can be said to be in Christ. For Paul, a relationship with Christ is marked by the fact that the believer is in Christ and Christ is in the believer.

Belonging to Christ: We Are All Baptized into One Body (1 Cor 12:13)

First Corinthians 12:13 reads, “We were all baptized into one body (ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν),” which points to another aspect of Paul’s thought on baptism, namely that it brings with it a unity of the ones baptized. A traditional formula, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is no male and female” in I Cor 12:13, Gal 3:28, and Col 3:11 (the last clause only in Galatians), means that the common life in Christ, into which one was baptized, implied a unity and a solidarity which questioned religious, cultural, and social conditions of the ordinary world order.

Paul can speak of the relationship with Christ established through baptism using terms of ownership (1 Cor 1:12; Gal 3:29; cf. 1 Cor 3:23). That a person “belongs to” or

¹⁵ See Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 9.

¹⁶ The *Hymn of the Pearl*, 112-13.

is a slave of his god, who is his “master” or “lord,” is a common idea in the world of religions (e.g., Isa 44:5). Given the widely spread confession of Jesus as the Lord (ὁ κύριος), the idea of belonging to him is implied. The metaphor of sealing in 2 Cor 1:22 has a similar meaning and may be associated with baptism. As a matter of fact, the idea of being sanctified at baptism (1 Cor 6:11) has similar connotations, for priests, offerings, buildings, etc. are “sanctified” (see, e.g., Exod 28:36; 29:44; Judg 17:3; 2 Chr 29:5) to God, and belong to God for that reason; they are there for his service and are under his protection.

In the first chapter of First Corinthians, Paul expresses his gratitude that he baptized so few (1:14-16), because of factions caused by baptism. Judging from the text, Christians in Corinth considered themselves as belonging to the one who had baptized them. For Paul, this kind of understanding was definitely wrong, for baptism was solely exercised in the name of Jesus Christ (later the so-called Trinitarian formula appears) and thus there is no reason to argue to whom they belong. Every one was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and thus belonged to him, simply because Jesus was crucified for all and because he alone is the Lord or the “owner” (κύριος) of the Christian believers. So it would be futile if baptism resulted in division or functioned as creating factions in a believing community. For this reason Paul tries to remind them that believers are to be united with Christ and with each other as one, and that the baptized does not belong to the baptizer, such as Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (1 Cor 1:12). Paul here never mentions the worthlessness of baptism for a Christian or for the Church. More important is reconciling the factions with each other and preserving the community of the Church in that situation.

Christian baptism, argues Paul, contains a significant feature, namely belonging to the Lord.

In his accounts of Christian baptism Paul employs “into Christ” (εἰς Χριστὸν, Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27), or “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1 Cor 6:11). In 1 Cor 1:12 he ironically states that he himself was not crucified for the Corinthians, nor were they baptized “into Paul’s name.” To Paul baptism somehow made Christ’s crucifixion a crucifixion “for” the one baptized. In other words, one “belongs to Christ” through baptism, which applies Christ’s vicarious death to the person being baptized. Paul in another place urges them not to be enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods (Gal 3:8). Thus the soteriological motif of Paul’s thinking was central in his understanding of baptism.

Summary: Pauline Theology of Baptism

As Schnackenburg claims, Paul may not have been ignorant of the baptismal teaching of the apostolic Church.¹⁷ For example, he knows of the baptismal formula “into the name of” (1 Cor 6:11) and John the Baptist’s baptism which is heavily associated with the idea of sin (Rom 6:1-11). Paul, however, has a new doctrine of baptism expressed in a distinctive way. Baptism functions in Paul’s thought as an initiatory rite of passage, in which all who are baptized experience a transformation so that their former

¹⁷ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul: A Study in Pauline Theology*, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 30.

sinful existence (Rom 5:12-21) is negated.¹⁸ In his argument Paul attempts to show how all Christians are transformed by God from the dominion of sin and death to the dominion of Christ. Baptism into Christ's death is how this transformation occurs. That human existence in sin's dominion is negated in baptism occurs only because part of baptism's role is to incorporate the baptized into the salvific event of the cross.¹⁹

Although Paul understands baptism to be the common rite of initiation for all Christians, he does not employ some of the more common images of initiation, such as "cleansing," or "purity" to depict what occurs in this rite whose prime physical component is water.²⁰ Though the imagery of "rebirth" is familiar in initiatory rites and is later picked up by the Deutero-Pauline letters (e.g. Tit 3:5), Paul himself does not associate this imagery with the inauguration wrought by baptism.²¹ Also, Paul never explicitly discusses the interrelationship between faith and baptism. He probably took it for granted that Christians who put their faith in Christ underwent baptism. Also, Paul never presents baptism in terms of the forgiveness of sins.²² He rather presents baptism,

¹⁸ Richard P. Carlson, "The Role of Baptism in Paul's Thought," *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 258.

¹⁹ Carlson, 258.

²⁰ The imagery of "washing" was used in non-Christian religions and was developed theologically within early Christianity. See Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 152-54.

²¹ A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background*, WUNT 44 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 61-63.

²² Carlson, "The Role of Baptism in Paul's Thought," 262.

by incorporating one into the death of Christ, as negating one's prior existence.²³ One may find that Paul's argument contains some characteristics similar to the mystery religions, especially in his way of using figurative language. In ancient times initiation to a religion was conceived as an identification of the initiate with the god in his or her dying and rising again. Hellenistic Christianity was strongly influenced by the mysteries, seen particularly in Paul's theology of baptism. In fact, the concept of dying and rising with Christ seems clear in Paul's teaching of baptism in the letter to the community at Rome. One of the most distinctive features in Pauline theology is that he understands salvation in terms of participation in the fate of the cult deity, as in the mystery religions. There are a number of passages in Paul's letters that speak of Christians' death with Christ and new life in him as based on the gospel itself and make no mention of baptism (Rom 7:4, 6; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Gal 2:19-20).²⁴ However, Paul in the baptismal passages implies that in the Christian sacrament of baptism, the Christian is initiated into one's new faith by experience of the fate of Christ, dying and rising with him into a new otherworldly existence (Rom 6:1-11).²⁵ In Rom 6:4 it is called *καινότητι ζωῆς* ("newness of life"). This kind of interpretation of baptism is never attempted by any Evangelist. Paul, however, uses the clause "Do you not know that----?" three times in a

²³ Carlson, "The Role of Baptism in Paul's Thought," 262.

²⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield, "Romans 6:1-14 Revisited," *The Expository Times* 106 (1994): 41.

²⁵ Helmut Koester, "Paul and Hellenism," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, edited by J. Philip Hyatt (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 188; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1, 140-44.

passage (Rom 6:3, 6, and 9); it presumes that the claim was what they have already known. Where does this concept come from? The idea did not stem from Judaism, John the Baptist, or the Gospel accounts describing Jesus' baptism by John. It seems that Paul was influenced by, or adapted dynamically, the new concept of baptism that was used in many mystery religions in the Greco-Roman world where Paul preached a new teaching about Christ. Likewise, Christians, especially Gentile Christians, might have been able to understand baptism as did the mysteries. At least, the addressees were not unfamiliar with what Paul was writing about, and this would mean that Paul addressed the baptismal teaching by using the idea and language of the people to whom he preaches. As Betz claims, Paul's mission for the Gentile can best be understood as the one "who introduced foreign gods and cults into a city."²⁶ One may remind of Paul's debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens who considered Paul as "a preacher of foreign divinities" (Acts 17:18).

Baptism in the Pauline School

Paul's disciple developed the idea in a manner that was different from Paul's. According to them, baptism incorporates believers into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (as presented in Col 2:12; Eph 2:1-6; Phil 3:10-11). The Epistle to the Colossians maintains that baptism actualizes Christ's victory over all cosmic powers so

²⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, "Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 87.

that the person baptized can share his victory. According to Colossians baptism is not only a death and a burial with Christ (2:12, 20), but also a resurrection with him “through faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead” (2:12). Baptism means sharing the destiny of Christ who, in his resurrection, triumphed over the cosmic powers (2:15), who were the authorities to which the “philosophy” referred (2:8, 16-23). As united with this sovereign, the baptized Christians are filled with his divine πλήρωμα (“fullness,” 2:9-10). Baptism is mentioned also under the imagery of circumcision (2:11). This imagery signifies that in baptism the “body of the flesh” (2:11), or the “old person and his deeds” (3:9), was put away. In other words, the previous conditions were changed in which one’s person was dominated by this-worldly, non-divine factors.

It has been suggested that the Epistle to the Ephesians is a baptism homily or represents a baptismal liturgy. In Ephesians, baptism becomes a focus of God’s immense salvific work: God is the one active behind it and in it (1:3-14; 2:4-10). Baptism is not described as a death or burial with Christ, but as a resurrection with him, indeed, being enthroned with him (2:6). In individual baptisms, Christ’s self-sacrifice is applied, and the rite adds new members to the Church, which is presented as a bride, cleansed by the bridal bath. Also in Ephesians, “the old man” must be put off and “the new man” must be put on (4:20–24), i.e., the life in Christ has to be realized. Baptism is in some sense the medium by which God brings the baptized into participation in Christ’s death and burial.

Especially in Titus, baptism is the crucial point in the application of God’s saving act through Christ to the individual. In imitation of Paul, the author contrasts God’s

grace in this means of salvation to human deeds of righteousness, which do not bring this salvation. The pre-Christian situation is painted as foolishness, disobedience, lusts, etc. (3:3). In baptism, however, God saves the Christian from this condition and gives him or her “righteousness” (1 Tim 6:11; Tit 2:12; 3:7). The effect of baptism is described as “regeneration” (cf. John 3:5; 1 Pet 2:2) and “renewal” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:15; 4:24). The renewal is effected by the Holy Spirit, the gift of which is connected with baptism, and it all gives Christians the hope of inheriting eternal life (3:5-7). That the admonitions in 3:8-11 follow the utterances on baptism is a sign that for this author baptismal renewal has to have a counterpart in real life.²⁷

Baptism purifies or cleanses the believers’ hearts (Eph 5:26). Christians therefore must lead a totally different kind of life, as written in Rom 6:12-23: “not under law but under grace,” because baptism gives “rebirth” or “renewal” by the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). The Christian moral life is a living out of the paschal mystery that baptism celebrates (2 Cor 4:10). For the Pauline school, the initiation event is a process of total identification with Christ.

²⁷ Lars Hartmann, “Baptism,” in Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 590.

CHAPTER 6

DIVERSITY OF BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCHES

Baptism in the *Acts of the Apostles*

Whether the Christian adoption of baptism began with Jesus himself or only with the Church after Jesus' resurrection cannot easily be resolved. What is certain is that within a short time after Jesus' death there were Christian believers who performed baptism upon converts, and that John's baptism was the point of departure for Christian baptismal practice. There is a striking continuity between John's baptism and the baptism to which Peter invited the Jews assembled in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Ac 2). There is also, however, a striking discontinuity.

In the Acts of the Apostle, there are two new elements in the function and the meaning of baptism: first, baptism occurred "in the name of Jesus Christ;" second, the baptism is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38).¹ The first Christians were unable simply to repeat John's baptism and they had to change the existing mode and implication of his baptism. In fact, in Jerusalem water was not abundant enough to immerse 3000 people a day (Acts 2:41); John was baptizing at Aenon because there was plenty of water available (Jn 3:23). The Christians altered the eschatological significance

¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Origin of Christian Baptism," *StL* 19 (1989), 38-40.

of baptism, exchanging John's emphasis upon repentance, forgiveness and God's wrathful judgment for Jesus' insistence upon God's compassionate presence as already having arrived in the human world.

In spite of the differences, the central elements of John's baptism were not lost in Christian Baptism.² Luke seems to highlight the impressive continuity from John's baptism to the practices of the early Church in Acts. Luke portrays the correlation of Christian baptism with repentance, just as the baptism of John is intimately associated with repentance in Luke-Acts: "Repent and be baptized---" (Acts 2:38). Baptism functions as the medium by which repentance comes to expression and as the sign that forgiveness has been granted.³ John's baptism continues its importance in Acts in the sense that repentance leads to forgiveness (Lk 24:47; Ac 3:19; 5:31; 8:22). For this reason, primitive Christian baptism can be understood as a Christianized Johannine baptism. Though Jesus himself may not have been interested in exercising baptism as part of his ministry, at least in the Synoptic Gospels, Christians in the earlier church reappropriated it as a ritual means by which to link themselves to what Jesus was for and about, namely, the proclamation of God's gracious and definitive arrival.

² Joel B. Green, "From 'John's Baptism' to 'Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus': The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 164-65.

³ James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 33.

Baptism in Non-Pauline New Testament Writings

The theology of Baptism has been further developed continuously in other New Testament writings. Baptism is understood as enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 1 Pet 2:9).⁴ This understanding again may come from mystery cult initiation, from darkness to light, not only in ritual, but especially in understanding. In Heb 10:19-22, it is baptism that makes Jesus' sacrifice relevant; baptism applies Jesus' sacrifice to all Christians. It has brought about purification from their sins. Thus, baptism is closely related to Christ; this is linked with the high priest Christology of the letter in which Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is made relevant in baptism.⁵

Baptism in Non-Canonical Christian Writings

Didache

There are three different baptismal formulae in the *Didache*. *Didache* 7:1 presents the complete Trinitarian formula: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος; *Didache* 7:3 presents the Trinitarian formula without article: εἰς ὄνομα πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου πνεύματος; and *Didache* 9:5 knows the formula with one member: εἰς ὄνομα κυρίου. There is a general consensus of scholarship that *Didache* 9:5

⁴ See also Justin, *Apology* 1.61-65.

⁵ Lars Hartmann, *'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus': Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 124-26.

has preserved the most ancient baptismal formula. At the beginning of Christianity, one baptized “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), but later the formula was developed according to the growing Trinitarian theology. One more significant element in the baptismal theology of the *Didache* is that there is no trace of the Pauline theology of baptism.⁶ Baptismal theology in the *Didache* does not embrace the “death and burial with Christ” theology (Rom 6:1-11); the remission of sins was not explicitly linked with baptism, but continued to show the concerns of some Christians who were committed to the observance of ritual purity and the initiatory bath.⁷ It was a community that had reappropriated practices of baptism not emphasized by Jesus.

Apocryphal and Gnostic Writings

There are gnostic references showing that neither John the Baptist nor Christian baptism was regarded as important. The examples are as follows: “You baptized your souls in the water of darkness!” (*The Book of Thomas the Contender*, 144 in *NHL* II, 7); “Neither he (Moses) nor those before him, from Adam to Moses and John the Baptist, none of them knew me nor my brothers” (*The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 63 in *NHL* VII, 2). In this section, several books written after the New Testament era containing passages that refer to Christian baptism, will be studied: the *Epistle of*

⁶ Willy Rordorf, “Baptism According to the Didache,” in *The Didache in Modern Research*, edited by Jonathan A. Draper (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 222.

⁷ Rordorf, 222.

Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Truth.

The *Epistle of Barnabas*⁸ shows significant features in understanding the implication and practice of baptism in an early Christian community. Barnabas, in the eleventh chapter, relates the water of baptism to the cross, proclaiming: “Blessed are those who hoped on the cross, and descended into the water” (11:8). According to Barnabas, the prerequisite for baptism is the faith in the salvific act of Christ. After the candidate received the baptism of immersion, the baptized becomes purified and receives the remission of sins (11:1). Some distinctive features are to be noticed. First, there is an allegorical statement; Barnabas uses Psalm 1:3 to designate the tree to the baptized, where the descent and ascent of the cross seems a model for the descent and ascent of the candidate in baptism (11:6-12:1). Second, an association of water with the cross is made; this is because both are related to the forgiveness of sins.⁹ The *Epistle of Barnabas* links the forgiveness of sins with the sprinkling of the Lord’s blood in 5:1, as in Mt 26:28. The forgiveness of sins made possible by the blood of Jesus is received in the water of baptism. The references to forgiveness of sins that makes one new in 6:11 and 16:8 are also in baptismal contexts. This textual supports on the one hand that the early Christians

⁸ It is generally agreed that the author was from Alexandria, in view of his fondness of the allegorical approach for which Alexandria was well-known and the fact that all the earliest evidence for the existence of the document derives from there. It appears to have been written after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (16.3-5), but before the city was rebuilt by Hadrian following the revolt of 132-135 C.E.

⁹ Everett Ferguson, “Christian and Jewish Baptism According to the Epistle of Barnabas,” in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSS, 234 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2002), 212.

associated baptism with the forgiveness of sins and, on the other hand, implies that Jewish washings did not procure forgiveness of sins, because Christian baptism is alone able to purify.¹⁰ The *Epistle of Barnabas* enlarges the horizon of one's understanding of the early Christian communities' practice of baptism.¹¹

Though the *Shepherd of Hermas*¹² does not seem to contain any significant material about baptism, Hermas' message is given in the context of the author's dealing with the apostates who return to faith, that is, whether the church should ask a second *metanoia* from them even though they did repent at their baptism earlier.¹³ It is full of allegories and pictorial language so that one may misunderstand the nature of baptism embedded in *Hermas*. One can note that baptism is understood as a result of hearing the word of preaching (*Vision* 3.7.3). More important is that the *Hermas* does not claim

¹⁰ This is paralleled to Justin, *Dialogue*, 14.1 and 19.2.

¹¹ For further information on the book, see Mark Ellingsen, *Reclaiming Our Roots: An Inclusive Introduction to Church History*, vol. 1 (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1991). For a developed argument of Pauline influence on the Post-Apostolic Christian writers, see James C. Paget, "Paul and the Epistle of Barnabas," *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996): 359-81.

¹² The *Shepherd of Hermas* was one of the most popular books produced in the early Church, and for a time it was frequently quoted and regarded as inspired. With 5 Visions, 12 Mandates, and 10 Similitudes, the book is characterized by strong moral earnestness. It is primarily a call to repentance and adherence to a life of strict morality, addressed to Christians among whom the memory of persecution and tribulation is still vivid. For a discussion on its authority with popularity, see "Introductory Note to the Pastor of Hermas," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 3-8. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 64-65.

¹³ Concerning the baptism of the Shepherd, see Lars Hatman's "Baptism in the Didache and in the Shepherd of Hermas" in his book, *'Into the Name of the Lord Jesus,'* 178.

baptism as an instrument of purification, because purity is not connected with baptism but is linked to the remission of sins or repentance. Thus, baptism is “the sacrament of faith” (*Mandates* 4.3.1-3). One more striking feature in *Hermas*’ presentation of baptism is his use of a metaphor: baptism is as death and resurrection (*Similitudes* 9.16.3). The candidates are portrayed as standing under sin and death, and that the state of death can be abolished by receiving the seal of preaching, that is baptism (*Similitudes* 9.16.5).¹⁴

In addition, the *Nag Hammadi Library* has few texts that deal with baptism, such as the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Gospel of Truth*, etc.¹⁵ They do not represent one single Gnostic tradition. To the contrary, sacraments and rites of various Gnostic sects differed both in practices and understanding. For example, in the *Gospel of Truth* there are some ceremonies belonging to baptism-chrism: divesting, baptism in water, investiture, unction with holy oil, and raising up. The order of these acts is clear.¹⁶ The *Gospel of Philip* is one of the most important texts for the knowledge of the sacramental system and the liturgy. One learns that there are baptism, chrism, Eucharist, redemption, and bridal chamber. The system of five sacraments seems not to be peculiar to the *Gospel of Philip*. Logion 19 of the *Gospel of*

¹⁴ Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (London: Longmans, 1951), 106.

¹⁵ James M. Robinson ed., *Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

¹⁶ Eric Segelberg, “The Baptismal Rite according to Some of the Coptic-Gnostic Texts of Nag-Hammadi,” in *Studia Patristica* 5, edited by Frank L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie, 1961), 123-24. See also Segelberg’s another article, “The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and Its Sacramental System,” *Numen* 7 (1960), 189-200.

Thomas seems to contain a reference to the five Gnostic rituals: “For there are five trees in Paradise...whoever knows them will not taste death.” This passage alludes to the story of Alcinoos’ garden in the *Odyssey*.¹⁷ The rite of initiation is of interest for our study. Characteristic in the *Gospel of Philip* is that the rite deals with descent and ascent (59, 109). The baptized descends into the water. What kind of water is not stated, but the water seems to have been deep enough for total immersion (43). Probably before the descent there was a divesting, followed after the ascent by the investing with the baptismal robe.¹⁸

In summary, some aspects of New Testament theology on baptism that were regarded as crucial are barely represented here. The study of post-apostolic Christian writings leads one to conclude that there were many different forms of baptismal teaching and practice in the Christian communities of the first centuries.

¹⁷ See especially *Odyssey*, 8,115-132.

¹⁸ “Therefore, when he comes and descends into the water, he will undress, in order that he may endue this,” (101); “Those who put on the vestments are chosen for the vestments of the kingdoms of heaven,” (24).

CHAPTER 7

BAPTISM AS A SACRAMENT IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY: A CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENT OF UNITY

Walter Kasper asserts that Christian theology must possess three characteristics. As the reflected memory of the Church, theology must be done “within the communion of the Church, on the foundation of the Church, and in subjection to the norm of the Church’s living tradition.”¹ Second, Christian theology must be focused on God who communicates God-self to humanity through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, for it is God, theology’s real object, from whom it derives its unity and coherence.² Third and finally, theology must have a “praxis-oriented openness for the problems of the time,”³ which takes seriously a “Christian responsibility for the world.”⁴ Kasper focuses on the Church’s mediation of God’s grace and love, in the person of Christ, to the world. This topic of Church’s active role in the world is reflected in Vatican II: the Church as communion among the believers and between God and God’s people; the Church that finds its divine fullness in the sacraments, and so on. Christian theology and Christian faith are inseparable but closely connected as one, because both are based upon the

¹ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 5.

² Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 8.

³ Kasper, 11.

⁴ Kasper, 13.

biblical teachings and ecclesiastical traditions as well. This chapter, which deals with theological approaches to baptism, is an attempt to recognize how the practice and theology of baptism are being interpreted and applied in the contemporary Church, in and through which the sacrament of baptism is practiced.

In Ephesians 4:5, Christians understood themselves as united in a single faith by the “one baptism” that joins them with the one Lord, Jesus Christ. The oneness, however, does not exist because of something achieved by Churches, but because of the one Christ into whom the faithful are baptized. The unity stems from the unity of Christ. Christians have confessed in the creed the reality of one Church. For the ecumenical movements it is important to achieve a unity within a plurality that now finds itself divided. It is generally agreed ecumenically that baptism is not only a sacrament of salvation (1 Pet 3:21), but also a sacrament of initiation into the Christian community. This means that the baptized are incorporated into the Church by means of participation in Christ’s fate. This is present in a text of Vatican II.⁵ Christian Churches teach these two basic meanings of baptism, though they differ in their concrete baptismal practices.

In much recent ecumenical literature, scholars tend to place baptism in the context of a rich Ecclesiology of communion, arguing that although baptism brings about incorporation into the body of Christ, the communion achieved in baptism cannot be seen

⁵ For example, *Lumen Gentium* states that “They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept its whole structure and all the means of salvation that have been established within it, and within its visible framework are united with Christ, who governs it through the supreme pontiff and the bishops, by the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government and communion” (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

as complete if the particular churches lack ecumenical unity. In an ecumenical perspective, baptism would be sufficient for Church unity. Michael Root and Risto Saarinen support this idea, stating that, "If we admit that through baptism persons enter into communion with their own Church, then the mutual recognition of baptisms should in itself imply a communion between the Churches."⁶ In order to demonstrate how baptismal theology plays a role in uniting Christians and Church together, diverse ecclesiologies both from the traditional perspective and ecumenical discussion will be discussed.

Two Main Models of Ecclesiology: Institution and Communion

Avery Dulles analyzes the so-called basic models of the Church such as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. Each model represents an effort to understand the community called the Church in terms of a basic paradigm drawn from ordinary human experience.⁷ Among the many models Dulles lays focus on two opposite models of Ecclesiology, namely, institutional and communion Ecclesiologies. The institutional model is interested in the outer aspects of the Church, while the communion model stresses its inner elements. The former can be identified with a Christological model and the latter a Pneumatological model. In the institutional

⁶ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, eds., *Baptism and the Unity of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3-4.

⁷ See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974).

model, developed mainly in Catholicism, especially in pre-Vatican II, the Church is defined primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of offices.⁸ Institutional Ecclesiology is based on Jesus as Christ who lived a salvific life and the historical apostolic witnesses to the Christ event, believing that Christ is present in the Church through its apostolate.⁹ Accordingly, it is natural for institutional Ecclesiology to place its emphasis on the universal Church rather than on the local Churches and their diversities.

The traditional (not ecumenical) communion model, on the contrary, stresses the invisible, inner aspect of the Church, such as mutual fellowship or communion. For Avery Dulles, the notion of the people of God coexists with that of the body of Christ; they represent the Church as communion. He pays attention to “the immediate relationship of all believers to the Holy Spirit, who directs the whole Church.”¹⁰ In this way, communion Ecclesiology not only harmonizes the notions of the people of God and the body of Christ,¹¹ but also insists upon the spiritual communion of Church members.

As mentioned, the role of Holy Spirit in the communion Ecclesiology is essential, for the Spirit is considered as working for the bond of the members.¹² In the dynamic

⁸ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 31.

⁹ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 121.

¹⁰ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 49.

¹¹ Dulles, 46.

¹² The important New Testament statement of baptismal gift is that it bestows the

work of the Spirit, the community members are interconnected with one another. Their union is different from the unity under apostolic authority. Whereas the apostolic unity is based on the visible hierarchical structure, the spiritual union is based on the invisible interrelationship among the members by means of mutual love and service. This spiritual communion is dynamic wherever the Spirit, who is not bound to any particular place, is at work. It is said that communion Ecclesiology stresses the many, local Churches, whereas institutional Ecclesiology stresses the one and universal Church. In the communion Ecclesiology, Trinitarian dimension should be emphasized. Christians have confessed that God exists in the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Since the divine communion is open to humanity and other creatures, it provides human beings with a hope for the realization of their freedom when they are united with God.¹³

However, any model for Ecclesiology needs to be balanced in order to include the diverse essential aspects of the Church, because every model has strong points and weak points. For instance, because institutional Ecclesiology, in which unity is to be explained by hierarchical structure, stresses the visible structure of the Church, it would be easy to discern whether a community is truly Christian. Likewise, in communion Ecclesiology, community members may perceive their mutual oneness in the Spirit. While Christological Ecclesiology tends to overlook the Holy Spirit's role in the Church, pneumatological Ecclesiology tends to diminish the apostolic tradition. Therefore, the elements of Christology and Pneumatology in Ecclesiology might be equally emphasized

Spirit (Acts 2:38; Mk 1:8; Acts 19:1-7; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Heb 6:4).

¹³ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 42-46.

because they are inseparable. It is privileged that a new synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology has arisen in recent communion Ecclesiology from the contemporary ecumenical trend, in that the conception of communion derives from the Christian faith in God whose being is relational, triune, and communal. This communal connection of Christology and Pneumatology is clearly embodied in the Sacraments, which are paradigmatic examples of the interdependence of Christology and Pneumatology, as far as Ecclesiology is concerned.¹⁴ Eucharistic Ecclesiology represents the mutual unity of the Churches and the communion among them, and thus the Eucharistic approach strengthens communion Ecclesiology without ignoring the institutional elements. John Zizioulas writes:

The Holy Spirit, in making real the Christ-event in history, makes real at the same time Christ's personal existence as a body or community. All separation between Christology and Ecclesiology vanishes in the Spirit.¹⁵

Zizioulas believes that the dichotomy between Christology and Pneumatology can be overcome in the Eucharist, because the Eucharist interconnects Christology and Pneumatology in that Christ's body is effectively communicated to the believers thorough the work of the Spirit. In the communion of the Church, articulated in the

¹⁴ In his book *Models of the Church*, Dulles indicates a clear preference for the sacramental model of the Church in his work. He believes the sacramental model offers the broadest base for constructing a balanced ecclesiology. According to him, it relates the Christian community's institutionalized activities to the shared inner life of the Spirit. He says that the dominant ecclesiological concepts of Vatican II are clearly "the people of God" and "the Church as sacrament of salvation" (34, 51).

¹⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111.

Eucharist, human beings become capable of a new relationship with the cosmos, i.e., non-exploitative relations with the material order.

Moltmann develops his understanding of Eschatology in terms of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through a Trinitarian elaboration. This enables him to reinterpret the doctrine of the Church in a new way. Between the Church as sacrament and the Church as witness, Moltmann is able to mediate a critical yet sympathetic path by understanding the Church as the open community of the Holy Spirit. By placing the Church's mission within a comprehensive framework which is Trinitarian, he overcomes partial and one-sided conceptions of the Church while still trying to incorporate the truth of each.¹⁶

Church as People of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of Holy Spirit

Minear, in his book *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, examines the use of images in the New Testament that refer to Church. The first group is minor images, which includes 'the salt of the earth,' 'the ark,' 'the bride of Christ.' Second, there are "configurations of images that should be regarded as major and decisive," including the conceptions of "people of God" and "body of Christ," but "no one figure can be selected as the dominating base line of all thought about the Church."¹⁷ Minear explains that the purpose of each comparison is that, "Image after image points beyond itself to a realm in

¹⁶ See Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*.

¹⁷ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 222.

which God and Jesus Christ and the Spirit are at work.”¹⁸ His attempt is to show how much the images gain by their interrelation with each other. That is why there needs not of one but of many to point to the reality of the activity of the Triune God. This section deals with a theology of the Church as “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” These three images are not separated, but coherently interrelated.

Church as the People of God

The analogy of the ‘people of God’ as Church derives first from the Jewish notion of the people of God. The image of the people of God stresses the continuity with the people of Israel, that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and that it is the community of the new covenant. In the Old Testament, special relationship between God and the Israelites was established by God as a form of covenant: God is the God of Israel, and Israel is the people of God. Israel’s self identity as the people of God was significantly experienced in the Sinai covenant, and passes throughout their history. The people of God are elected and created by God as God’s own possession through the forgiveness of sin and by God’s grace (Ac 13:17; 15:14; Rom 9:23-26; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9-10; Heb 2:17; Rev. 21:3). That means that the Church is bound to God in a covenant. This Old Testament notion of the people of God, especially the prophets’ notion of the eschatological people of God, was applied to the early Christians. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they believed

¹⁸ Minear, *Images of the Church*, 223.

that Jesus, who was also the eschatological Messiah, would lead them to the new Kingdom. Keeping this faith, Jesus' disciples and the primitive Christians recognized more and more that they were the new people of God, the eschatological people of God.

In the *Lumen Gentium* the Church as the people of God is said to be a Spirit-filled community, "a fellowship of life, charity, and truth" (119). When the Church is understood as the people of God, it is a visible and social unity, but it is not identical with any given social organization because the Church is an essentially spiritual community,¹⁹ and because the Church's characteristics as a spiritual community derives from the work of the Holy Spirit, who chooses, inspires, and leads the people of God.

If the Church is understood as the people of God, it contains at least two theological significances, as many scholars clarify. First of all, when the Church is the people of God, each person belongs to the Church through God's call. When some individuals perform the will of God, such as mission and ministry, this is not an individual but a communal activity because they do it as members of the whole community. Second, because the Church is the people of God, the Church can never be above real human beings. The faithful all belong to the Church through their human decisions, although God calls them to the Church over which Christ's lordship lies: the Church is in actual fact an assembly of human beings. Since the Church is the gathering of human beings, not only God's grace and love but humans' free faith and obedience are also necessary for the people of God. Even though the Church as the people of God looks like a small flock, it actually includes all humanity and the whole creation, because

¹⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 49.

God plans to save the whole creation, including humanity, through the work of Church for and through which the Spirit works (*Lumen Gentium*, 119).

Church as “the Body of Christ” (I Cor 12:27)

According to Acts 2:41 being baptized would mean being added to the Christian community. Baptism includes an ecclesial dimension, “incorporating the baptized person into the Church as the body of Christ through the Spirit.”²⁰ Baptism normally takes place in an actual local congregation, but baptism is more than inclusion in a local congregation and also more than inclusion in a particular confession. Kasper admits that in baptism more is involved than the personal salvation of the individual.²¹

When, according to the Eucharistic tradition, Jesus spoke of “my body,” he spoke of his future presence with his disciples as a presence “for you.” Jesus uses the term in the Last Supper, and Paul uses it generally. Thus, the “body of Christ” is primarily Christ himself crucified for the sake of his followers (Rom 7:4; Col 1:22). According to Paul, Christians do not simply become unified by a common belief, rather they become “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27) because they are “baptized into one body” (v.13). This “one body” is Christ’s body.

²⁰ Bultmann. *Theology of the New Testament*, vol.1, 311.

²¹ Walter Kasper, “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of Baptism,” *The Ecumenical Review* 52 (2000), 530.

When one says that a Church is the body of Christ, it would mean that “the Church is the object in and through which the risen Christ is available to be found, to be responded to, and to be grasped.”²² The following observation may be offered. First, the believer is baptized into one body, not so as to form the body but to participate in it, to be added to it. Second, the body exists before the believer is baptized; through grace he or she is incorporated into it by the Spirit. Third, the believer is baptized into one body because he or she is baptized into Christ, not vice versa. It is impossible to contemplate being baptized into Christ without being baptized into the body.²³

Scholars have provided a thorough examination of the biblical passages that relate to the body concept, including those on baptism and the Eucharist. Hans Küng interprets the two concepts, people of God and body of Christ, as being closely linked both in Paul’s thinking and through their Jewish roots.²⁴ The doctrine of the body of Christ indicates that Christ is present in the Church as the risen Lord, as noted before. He is for the Church not only an event in the past or in the future but is present in its life and work. Christ is its Lord (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; etc.), although Christ is continually present with his Church. Therefore, it is misleading to use language that implies the identity of the Church with Christ, so as to speak of the Church as a divine-human reality or the

²² Robert W. Jenson, “The Church and the Sacrament,” *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, edited by Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210.

²³ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 170-71.

²⁴ See Hans Küng, *Church*, translated by Ray Ockenden and Rosaleen Ockenden (NY: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 107-260.

extension of the incarnation. The teaching authority of the Church can never lie in its own first-hand teaching; it must always be derived from Christ and his word. The Church is not Christ in the sense of embodying his authority and infallibility. Rather, it draws its direction and power from him as its head, as does a human body (Eph 4:15–16).

According to Anselm Min, “There are four dimensions to the body of Christ: the bodily, the Christological, the ecclesiological, and the Trinitarian.”²⁵ Among the four dimensions, the ecclesiological sense of the body of Christ is very important and it has also “four dimensions to consider: the ecclesiastical, eschatological, solidaristic, and Eucharistic.”²⁶ First of all, one can think of the Eucharistic body of Christ, which rendered present to humans through sacramental symbols. Through the Eucharist, all the dimensions of Christ’s body “become visibly present to us in all their meanings, invitations, and challenges.”²⁷ Also, the notion of Trinitarian dimension of the body of Christ is to be dealt importantly. Concerning the theological issue about the Trinitarian body of Christ, Anselm Min states,

Finally and most important, there is the Trinitarian dimension of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is essentially a Trinitarian event. The creation of the material universe, the cosmic body of Christ, the redemption of humanity as the wounded and suffering body of Christ, the re-creation of both history and nature as participation in the risen body of Christ---all these are rooted in the eternal solidarity or perichoresis of the immanent Trinity, three distinct persons yet sharing in the unity of the divine substance, and take place in time through the economic activities of the

²⁵ Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (T & T Clark International: NY, 2004), 144.

²⁶ Min, *Solidarity of Others*, 146.

²⁷ Min, 148-49.

triune God, God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. ---It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, who gives life by establishing the unity in diversity and solidarity of others in the manifold body of Christ.---The Trinity, especially Pneumatology, remains an essential context for all theological reflection on the body of Christ.²⁸

The Church does not exist for itself but for God, and, precisely, for the world.

Christians are in communion (*koinonia*) with one another because they participate in the one body of Christ. It is a union among themselves based on their real participation in the one life-giving body of Christ (Mk 10:38). Because Christians are in Christ, or because Christ is in Christians, they are one among themselves. Here is Paul's basic thought, which he so often expresses by the formulas 'in Christ' and 'Christ in us' (Rom 8:39; 2 Cor 1:21, etc). Here again one finds Paul's sacramental statement in 1 Cor 12:12-13. The risen Christ creates and unifies his Church through sacramental contact. The individual Christ unites Christians to himself through baptism. Baptism is not therefore simply a documentation of an already existing identity with Christ, but as an initiation it is a means by which Christ makes Christians his members. In the sacrament of baptism there is sacramental union of the body of the Christian with the body of Christ in death and resurrection (Rom 6: 3-5).

Church as the Temple of the Spirit

Church can be defined as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes human beings enter into the people of God, and also enables Church as the body of Christ

²⁸ Min, *Solidarity of Others*, 149.

through making the sacraments and the apostolic proclamation legitimate in the Christian lives. Tillard states, "The power of the Holy Spirit makes the crucified one the Lord only by joining humanity over which he will reign."²⁹ Küng also understands that the Church is the Temple of the Spirit because the Spirit dwells within it and because the Spirit provides the Church with the power and the strength by which it grows in faith.³⁰ The Spirit also inspires and strengthens the Church so that the Church may recognize and perform the will of God, which is to proclaim the redemptive work of Christ to the world. Furthermore, the Spirit unifies the Christians as the one body of Christ without ignoring their diversity, so that they may not be separated, but interconnected the one body, the Church. The Spirit's role which unifies Christians is rooted in the Trinitarian communion because the Spirit bonds the Father and the Son without destroying fatherhood and sonship.

Moltmann suggests that the Holy Spirit might be interpreted as the eschatological entity whose work reaches throughout the whole creation. The Spirit's work is to glorify the Trinity and to unite the whole creation in and with the glorified triune God, though the unity will be fulfilled at the *parousia*.³¹ One of the most distinctive features in Moltmann's theology is his understanding the work of the Holy Spirit for the Church in terms of cosmic dimension and Trinitarian dimension at the same time. According to

²⁹ Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R. C. De Peaux (Collegiville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 21.

³⁰ See Küng, *Church*, 169-75.

³¹ Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 60.

him, since the Spirit dwells both in Christians and in the whole creation the Church members' experience of the Spirit leads them to "solidarity" with all other creatures.³²

Since the Holy Spirit is cosmic, the Church as the temple of the Spirit becomes a cosmic community in which human beings and other created beings participate and are reconciled in the Spirit. In Christian faith, humanity and other creatures can have solidarity through the work of the Spirit because the Spirit is essentially communal.

In sum, the Church could be understood in terms of the cosmic community, and this cosmic community can be termed in three ways: the people of God the Father, the body of Christ, and the cosmic temple of the Spirit. One thing to be noticed, however, is that all three modes of indicating the Church denote one community: the Church of the triune God. The triune God is one; thus the Church must also be one, because the Church is established and nourished by the triune God. It is necessary for the members of the cosmic Church to recognize that God as the Creator takes care of the whole creation, that God calls the people of God to participate in the work for the whole world, and that their task is to take care of it in solidarity with other creatures. Here one is reminded of Paul's saying: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves." (Rom 8:22-23a). In the power of the Spirit, human beings can become the people of God and a part of the body of the Christ. In the power of the Spirit, the Christians realize that they must take care of other creatures and glorify God the Creator, because "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

³² Moltmann, 101.

Church and Sacrament

Augustine has played an important role in the history of sacramental theology because he clarified some sacramental notions, such as the sacramental sign and consecration. According to Augustine, the sacrament can primarily be defined as a sacred sign which reveals the divine truth.³³ Although all things can serve as sacred signs, if they represent the divine mysteries, baptism and the Eucharist are the most important sacraments because they cause a historic event in the process of salvation to be actually present as a means of the individual salvation, and insinuate the spiritual gift which the divine power makes effective by means of them.³⁴ Baptism and the Eucharist are sacred signs for the divine reality of grace, and effective signs of grace and faith,³⁵ because they continue to actualize and realize Christ's salvific events in us.³⁶ The signs can be called the sacraments through which the divine mysteries are represented and which lead us to the divine reality. The sacramental sign is meaningful when it brings the spiritual fruit to us.³⁷

³³ Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 10. 5; *Contra Faustum* 19.11. See also Michael G. Lawlor, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (NY: Paulist Press, 1987), 32

³⁴ Augustine, *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani Libri Tres* 2.3.28-9.

³⁵ Augustine, *De doctr. Christ* 9.13.

³⁶ Augustine, *Contra Faustaum* 19. 13:16

³⁷ Augustine, "Sermon 272."

Meanwhile, Karl Rahner attempts to uncover the essential connection between the sacraments and the Church.³⁸ Because Christ is God's definitive and irrevocable Word of grace in which the redemption of the whole world is given in principle, there had to be a permanent embodiment of Christ in the world. Thus, there is in the incarnation an inherent necessity for a sacramental Church. The institution of a sacrament can follow from the fact that the sacramental nature of the Church founded by Christ ultimately requires the sacraments for its actualization. Rahner argues that the sacramentality of the sacraments does not stem from their being instituted directly by Jesus Christ, but from their expressing the sacramentality of the Church, which is the fundamental sacrament. In other words, "the institution of a sacrament can ...follow simply from the fact that Christ founded the Church with its sacramental nature."³⁹ The essence of the sacraments is not only Christological but also ecclesiological in the sense that Jesus Christ instituted the Church that institutes them.

According to Rahner, the Church's purpose is to proclaim and serve the mystery of God's self-communication to the world in Jesus. Rahner's early reflections on Ecclesiology stress "the Church as the fundamental sacrament," the visible sign of God's offer and gift in Christ. As Jesus Christ is the real symbol of God's self-communication, the Church is the symbol of Christ's grace. As sacrament, the Church is a sign and cause of grace, signifying and making effective God's irrevocable gift in Christ. Rahner's

³⁸ For a comprehensive reflection of the Church as the sacrament, see Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963).

³⁹ Rahner, *Church and the Sacraments*, 41.

concern over the faith of the recipient of the sacraments and the Eucharistic element in the Church are important contributions to Roman Catholic Ecclesiology.

Twentieth century sacramental theology has regained an awareness of the intimate connections between the sacraments and the Church as a whole, instead of seeing them almost exclusively as channels of grace to individuals. The Church both celebrates the sacraments and is built up by them. Protestants tend to begin with the Word and sacraments by which God continually creates and constitutes the Church, so that the Church may then 'administer' what it first receives. Catholics emphasize the Church already established as the body of Christ, without which the sacraments could not be performed. The Second Vatican council, in its dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, goes on to refer to the Church as "a kind of sacrament, that is, the sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of people." According to many Protestants, that attributes too active a role to the Church in the mediation of salvation. A considerable ecclesiological renewal, at any rate, has taken place under the rubric of the Church as a baptismal and Eucharistic community.

Alexander Schmemmann, a scholar of the Orthodox Church, highlights the fact that *ekklesia* means "a gathering," "an assembly," whose purpose is to manifest and realize the Church. The first and basic act of the Eucharist, consequently, is always the gathering or assembly. It is what Schmemmann calls the 'Sacrament of the Assembly.' Christians come to Church to assemble together as the Church, to constitute the Church as individual members of the Body of Christ in holiness that is not our holiness but

Christ's.⁴⁰ The Eucharist is usually called a sacrament, but Schmemmann points out that a sacrament is primarily relationship to the sacramentality of creation itself, for the world was created and given to human beings for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life.⁴¹ Whenever Christians assemble, they witness that Christ is Lord; that his kingdom has been revealed and bestowed upon humanity; and that a new and immortal life has been granted. This indicates that a Church (*ekklesia*) is particularly a sacrament of love. Christians go to Church to receive this love and reveal it to the world. The Church is a unity from above, for the whole order or visible reality of the Church is alive because of this relationship. Schmemmann stresses that Eucharist is a single sacrament in which all parts are integrated as a whole that is universal, eternal, and meaningful, that thanksgiving is the presence, joy, fullness, and knowledge of God.⁴²

Unlike scholars who regard the Church as sacrament, E. Jüngel attempts to figure out the theology of sacrament from a different perspective. His analysis of the New Testament use of the word *mustèrion*, of which the Latin *sacramentum* is the translation, shows that Jesus Christ is the only sacrament of the Church. The mystery of God's decision in favor of humanity has been realized in the act of God in Jesus, and through him is realized in humanity.⁴³ For Protestants, baptism and Eucharist cannot be called

⁴⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, translated by Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 23.

⁴¹ Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, 33-34.

⁴² Schmemmann, 133-40.

⁴³ E. Jüngel, "Die Kirche als Sakrament?" *ZTK* 80 (1983): 438-41.

sacraments in the biblical sense, but the “two celebrations of Christ as the one and only sacrament.” This one-sided Christological conception of sacrament has been criticized by J. Moltmann.⁴⁴ The New Testament *mysterion*, he points out, extends beyond Christology and refers also to Pneumatology, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. The work of the Spirit as the eschatological gift for Messianic times, and the Church and the history of the world in their directedness toward the fulfillment of the kingdom, should also be considered as part of the *mysterion*. Moltmann advocates a Trinitarian concept of sacrament that integrates the pneumatological aspect of the *mysterion*. This transcends both the exclusively christological approach of Jüngel and K. Rahner’s conception of the Church as the fundamental sacrament, which Moltmann criticizes for its ecclesiological onesidedness. He wants to overcome the difference within the Evangelical-Catholic convergence by his pneumatological and eschatological approach. The pneumatological dimension is also taken seriously by those Roman Catholic theologians who prefer to speak of the Church as ‘the sacrament of the Spirit.’⁴⁵

Ecclesial Significance of Baptism and Eucharist

The Church is a community of the Eucharistic communion and the Eucharistic communion derives from the divine communion, that is, the communion between the

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 199-206.

⁴⁵ A. H. C. Van Eijk, “The Church as Sacrament: A Contribution to Ecumenical Understanding,” *Bijdragen* 48 (1987): 238.

Father, the Son, and the Spirit. For Christians, the Eucharistic communion is a way of participating in the divine communion through their union with Christ by means of eating and drinking the bread and wine, which signifies the body and the blood of Christ. Since Christians can be united with the divine being by participating in the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ, the Church' communion is constituted in and through the Eucharistic communion. The Church's communion as the one body of Christ begins with baptism, but it is highlighted by Eucharist. That is why Zizioulas claims that the Eucharist is not merely one sacrament among many, but a constitutive element of the being of the Church by which the Church is made a transcendental being, that is, the body of Christ, over the historical institution.⁴⁶

When the Church gathers in assembly to carry out the distinctive mission and ministry through the medium of its ritual actions, it embodies, makes present, and effectively continues the saving work of Christ. These ritual actions are called sacraments precisely for this reason. Since the Eucharist represents the body of Christ, it is very important to see the Eucharist in terms of its ecclesial meaning. As Walter Kasper states, "there is a very real connection between the unity of the ecclesial body of Christ and participation in the Eucharistic body of Christ."⁴⁷ In fact, New Testament writers emphasize the unity of believers with Christ and with one another. This Eucharistic unity is organic because it is based upon the members' participation in Christ's body and blood, which are the sources of their spiritual life. This organic unity is echoed by the imagery

⁴⁶ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 32.

⁴⁷ Kasper, "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of Baptism," 538.

of the vine and branches in John, which shows the Christian's union with Christ, as branches are united with the vine (Jn 15:1-12). In Paul's Eucharistic view, the Eucharist represents the relationship between the believers as body and Christ as head. Paul emphasizes that the Eucharist provides the participants with their union with Christ. Since Paul has a theology of the Eucharist that enables humans to be united with Christ and with other participants, the participation in the Eucharist creates a real sharing of life with Christ. Since Paul draws an analogy between the Church and the body (1 Cor 12:12-31), the Eucharistic body can be understood as the basis of the ecclesial body. In 1 Cor 10:14-22, Paul implies that the Church is a Eucharistic community, which is first united with Christ and then united with the members by means of the celebration of the Eucharist.

In short, Christ's whole body is sacramentally present not only in the Eucharist but also in baptism because baptism is a union of Christians with Christ. Christians are united primarily with his death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5), and then with his whole person (Gal 3:27). Through baptism, Christians are made into the body of Christ, and in turn, the body of Christ is formed by baptism because the Spirit unites the body of Christ through baptism (Eph 4:4-5).

Baptism as Sacrament

Baptism is not merely a human work mainly because the decisive agent in baptism is divine, working through the Holy Spirit within the Church which baptizes.

One of the most important characteristics of baptism as a sacrament points to the Church as a communion in Christ and thus precisely a communion under Christ's lordship. Baptism is the sacrament of Christian participation in, even union with, Christ. Paul teaches we are baptized into Christ Jesus (Rom 6:3). For Paul, to be baptized is to be clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27). Through baptism the baptized attains union with Christ. Moreover, to be baptized into Christ is always to be baptized into his body (1 Cor 12:13), that is the Church. In this sense, to be baptized is to be added to the community. Here baptism reflects the basic structure of the Church as a communion. It is claimed that all Christians have communion with Christ and that participation in Christ is the foundation of the Church's existence, because through the initiatory event an individual realizes and focuses on what forms the foundation of Christian life, such as unity with Christ, the gift of the Spirit, etc.⁴⁸ Since every Christian participates in Christ, all Christians are one with one another. As an initiation into the one body of Christ, baptism is also initiation into the Church, which is traditionally marked as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁸ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, eds., *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, 15.

⁴⁹ This has traditionally been called "four marks of the Church." One way to approach the question of how the true Church is to be distinguished from the false is to consider the ancient marks or notes of the Church. Ever since the Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E., Christians have confessed that the true Church of God is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. These four adjectives, arrived at by conflating the assertions made concerning the Church in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, represent the marks or notes by which the true Church is to be recognized. For an excellent study of the four marks of the Church, see Hans Küng, *The Church*, Ch. 4.

person baptized is united with all Christians in the one Church because one baptized by a particular Church is incorporated into the one universal Church.⁵⁰

Ecumenical Communion Ecclesiology

In the current ecumenical discussion, a single concept has taken center stage: the notion of *koinonia*. Though the relationship between baptism and ecclesial unity depends on how one explores what kind of communion it creates, in recent years it has become common to characterize the Church as a communion. For example, in the Roman Catholic tradition the 1985 Synod of Bishops identified *koinonia* as the dominant ecclesiological theme of the Second Vatican Council.⁵¹ Also in 1993 the theme of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches was “‘Toward Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness’: Faith and Order’s Dublin Text, April 1992.”⁵² In this document *koinonia* is presented as a central theme and as a response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982-1990*.⁵³ The concept of *koinonia* functions as a

⁵⁰ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, 15. See also Eugene L. Brand, “The Lima Text as a Standard for Current Understandings and Practice of Baptism,” *Studia Liturgica* 16 (1986): 40-63.

⁵¹ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, 38.

⁵² “‘Toward Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness’: Faith and Order’s Dublin Text, April 1992,” *One in Christ* 28 (1992): 357-86.

⁵³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982-1990: Report on the Process and the Responses* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990): 149-51.

synthetic and comprehensive category.⁵⁴

Not every one, however, agrees with the idea that the Church is a communion. There has been a negative view of that implicit Christology, on the basis of the idea that the concept of *koinonia* does not imply anything whatever about the meaning of Church. Schuyler Brown argues that “it would be going too far to claim that *koinonia* is the basis for New Testament Ecclesiology.”⁵⁵ He does not think the term *koinonia* is equated with Church in the New Testament. In ecumenical dialogues, nevertheless, the category of communion is important. The Church is characterized by and includes, among other elements, communion, that partaking together that is an image of the Trinitarian unity: in the grace of Christ, the love of God of creation, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the Church. The notion of communion plays a role in Ecclesiology as a “synthesis concept,”⁵⁶ “meta-model,”⁵⁷ or the concept that “harmonizes several biblical images.”⁵⁸ Ecumenical Communion theology defines the Church in terms of those elements of faith and grace that create community rather than in terms of ecclesiastical structures. The category of communion allows for various degrees of unity among the

⁵⁴ George Vanderbelde, “Koinonia Ecclesiology---Ecumenical Breakthrough?” *One in Christ* 30 (1994): 131.

⁵⁵ Schuyler Brown, “Koinonia as the basis of the New Testament Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 12 (1976): 165.

⁵⁶ Vandervelde, “Koinonia Ecclesiology---Ecumenical Breakthrough,?” 131.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Sullivan, “Koinonia as Meta-Model for the Future of Church Unity,” *Ecumenical Trends* 18 (1989): 1-7.

⁵⁸ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 54.

various ecclesial traditions, because “From the unity of Christ we seek to understand the unity of the Church on earth, and from the unity of Christ and his body we seek a means of realizing that unity in the actual state of our divisions on earth.”⁵⁹

That the Church is a communion involves both visible and invisible elements of communion. The visible elements refer to the visible gathering of the believers, and the invisible to the divine source of communion. The prominent feature of invisible elements of *koinonia* is participation in the life of God in grace. This participation is made through the sacraments: through baptism one participates in Christ’s death and resurrection; in the Eucharist the community members participate in the body of Christ.⁶⁰ Susan Wood investigates the various ecumenical documents that make the following assertions in providing the theological foundation of *koinonia*.⁶¹ First, the Trinity is the interior principle of ecclesial communion. Second, the Holy Spirit is the source of *koinonia*. Third, the Christian community can also be called *koinonia*, because it is the result of one’s union with God. Fourth, *koinonia* refers to the nature of the Church as body of Christ, people of God, and temple of the Holy Spirit. Fifth, this communion is entered through baptism and nourished and expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist.

⁵⁹ Hans-Georg Link ed., *Apostolic Faith Today: A Handbook for Study* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 76.

⁶⁰ Susan K. Wood, “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion,” in *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, edited by Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 40.

⁶¹ Wood, “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion,” 39-40.

Baptism and the Eucharist will reciprocally interpret each other, meaning that one is baptized into a Eucharistic community, and the Eucharistic community is the community of the baptized.⁶² In other words, the Eucharist will retrieve its baptismal basis when one understands the Eucharist “as the sacramental embodiment of the body of Christ into which we are baptized, both the risen body of Christ and the ecclesial body of Christ.”⁶³ As Susan Wood concludes, the relationship between baptism and communion Ecclesiology can be summarized as follows. First, there are both visible and invisible elements of communion. The unity one achieves in baptism as incorporation into the body of Christ is primarily soteriological and therefore belongs primarily to the invisible elements of communion. Second, incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism is inseparable from entrance into an ecclesial community. Third, the communion achieved in baptism is partial when the particular Churches are not ecumenically united one with the other. Fourth, the relationship of mutual interiority between the universal and the particular Churches is easily understood in terms of the Eucharist. Fifth, when one looks at the theologies of baptism and the Eucharist together, the rite of initiation restores the unity of the historical, sacramental, and ecclesial bodies of Christ through the unity of the Christological and ecclesiological interpretations of each.⁶⁴

Hermeneutical Reflection: Christian Baptism as a Sign of Unity

⁶² Wood, “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion,” 57-58.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

There are some points to be mentioned, as a concluding remark. First of all, God's self giving that the New Testament witnesses to as experienced in baptism is that of union with Christ and his work. According to Paul's teaching (Rom 6; Gal 3:27-28), baptism incorporates the faithful into Christ and his work, especially his death and resurrection. Through baptism union with Christ is attained. Closely related to the metaphor of union to Jesus Christ is the image, of incorporation into Christ's body on the Church. Paul is speaking of the unity of the body of Christ in which the Holy Spirit works, giving each Christian different gifts for the benefit of all. By baptism, Christians are identified with the community of those with whom God is working.

Second, baptism is the event that gives structure to the Christian life. This is because baptism is the beginning of the Christian life of discipleship and because baptism embodies the fundamental mystery of Christian existence. Baptism makes Christians by making individual participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Christian theology, the mysterious union with God is possible when the faithful are in Christ only through the work of the Holy Spirit. When one is baptized he or she dies and is buried with Christ and is resurrected from the grave in Christ, as indicated by immersion in water. The death and resurrection in baptism commit the baptized to a life of following Jesus as a faithful disciple. By the work of the Holy Spirit Christians can experience the renewal or rebirth in Christ (Gal 6:15; Eph 2:15; Titus 3:5). As Moltmann argues, the Church is a function of God's Trinitarian history with creation and the Holy Spirit is the mediation of history and eschatology. While the Church lives from the history of the

resurrection of the crucified Christ, “present power of his remembrance and this hope is called the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁵ The power of the Spirit is to be understood as the earnest and beginning of the new creation of all things in the Kingdom of God.⁶⁶

Everything in the Church, including proclamation, sacraments, worship, community and mission, must be understood from the activity of the Holy Spirit. In these events the Holy Spirit mediates the messianic mission of the crucified risen one and God’s eschatological power for life. The Trinity should be understood in principal as a formula for the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the cross, as Moltmann claims. In the Trinitarian understanding monarchical and imperialistic concepts of God would be criticized. Trinitarian theology depicts God’s eternal character of going outside in suffering with God’s creatures. God should be understood not as a simple being but as a fellowship. In this sense, Church as a communion of Trinitarian communion is a function of God’s Trinitarian history with creation.

From an ecumenical perspective, Christian discipleship involves undertaking the ministry of service to people and creation as the children God in Christ. God calls⁶⁷ the baptized disciples into specific areas where this stewardship is to be carried out and God gives the gifts needed for effective stewardship. It is the task of the Church to help baptized disciples hear the call and develop the gifts that have already come to them in

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *Church in the power of the Spirit*, 197.

⁶⁶ Moltmann, 191.

⁶⁷ According to Moltmann, baptism as the calling event in the life of an individual person corresponds only to a Church that follows Christ’s call, the “call to freedom.” See Moltmann, *Church in the power of the Spirit*, 242.

baptism. Every Christian's calling therefore is a call from God into the service of Christ in the world. Paul's great baptismal teaching in Romans, that one is baptized into Christ so as to participate in his death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11), works within his teaching that the Church is the body of Christ.

The third issue to point out is that baptism plays a foundational role in establishing the communion that is called the Church. Paul puts emphasis on the idea that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13), "for all (of you) are one in Christ Jesus." Baptism into one body by the one Spirit overcomes the deepest religious and social divisions of humankind. In the one body there is no room for maintaining the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, because in Christ they are all one. The unity of the body, however, does not consist in uniformity of character and function; on the contrary Paul explains how the very idea of a body presumes the necessity of members with different functions. In Paul's theology, these differentiated functions are possible because the body is a unity. As with the Supper, "baptism obliterates the disunities of people and harmonizes them in the unity of Christ's body in the one Spirit."⁶⁸ This teaching that emphasizes the unity of the Christians in the New Testament is made in connection with statement of baptism: through baptism, no matter who they are, "all are one." In this sense, the rites of initiation are signs of unity when they reinforce the biblical teaching that there is but one baptism which incorporates

⁶⁸ Beasley-Murray, 171.

those baptized into the one Lord.⁶⁹ For this reason, as Michael Root and Risto Saarinen mention, baptismal theology that points to unity overcomes the existing divisions by placing them in the context of the unity that is given prior to human ecumenical successes and failures.⁷⁰ Humans are living in the world where division plagues both Church and world. So it would be necessary to call attention to a critical point, that Christians as members of the one Church are members of all Churches, “even if alienated or separated members.”⁷¹ Hans Küng insists that “The real Church not only has a history, it exists by having a history....Ecclesiology is a response and a call to constantly changing historical situations.”⁷² The Church exists in its historical form, not beyond and above it. The Church in the world is required the spiritual power to change itself continuously in order to embody what Jesus lived and taught in his life.

⁶⁹ Eugene L. Brand, “Rites of Initiation as Signs of Unity,” in *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, edited by Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131.

⁷⁰ Michael Root and Risto Saarinen, *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷² Küng, *Church*, 13.

CONCLUSION

In the early centuries following the New Testament period, baptism continued to be the sign of a life-changing commitment to the lordship of Christ. As the church grew, it established standard procedures for receiving new converts. Before being baptized, converts underwent a period of instruction and training in the Christian life, which could last for several years. When they were ready they were brought into the assembly and confessed their faith in a statement similar to what is now called the Apostles' Creed. Then they would be separated into men and women for baptism, which was performed naked. Clothed in white garments, they would return to the assembly and take part in the Eucharist for the first time. Easter was the special time for receiving the newly baptized.

From early times it became the usual custom to initiate new converts into the Church through a process that included baptism. The process of becoming a Christian was interpreted and expressed in a variety of different ways. In some traditions the emphasis, however, was placed on the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). In others the metaphor of birth to new life was employed (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5-7). Others understood baptism as enlightenment (Heb 6:4; 1 Pet 2:9). Significantly, in Paul's theology the primary image was union with Christ through participation in his death (Rom 6:1-11). Such a variation in baptismal theology enables one to suppose that the ritual itself also varied considerably from place to place.¹ The

¹ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources*

procedure and the interpretation of baptism changed in the new Christian context. The changes did not take place once and for all, rather only successively and in various ways in different places. One thing is certain, namely that the late New Testament documents show a baptismal rite to be essential for entry into the Christian church (1 Peter, Titus, Mk 16:16; Mt 28:19b). As far as the baptismal rite is concerned, a variety of practices were characteristic in the early churches, and no single form of initiation prevailed or could claim originality.

It appears that both the procedure and the interpretation of baptism changed in the new Christian context. The Pauline churches in the gentile world are good examples. It is true to say that there was an unbroken continuity from the baptism of John, through the baptism associated with the activity of Jesus, to the baptism practiced by the early Christians. Even in the biblical era, however, baptism was a ritual undergoing development. For example, the concept of dying and rising together with Christ in baptism becomes prominent, which is not found prior to the Romans.² As Christianity developed and as it was taken up by Gentiles, many of the new Christians would have had a background in or knowledge of the mystery religions and incorporated elements from these mystery religions in their new faith.

As a result of significant development, other aspects of initiation also became prominent; the water rite alone did no longer carry the whole weight of Christian

and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy (New York: Oxford University press, 1992), 46-47.

² Hans Dieter Betz, "Transferring a Ritual: Paul's Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, edited by Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 110.

initiation. Accordingly, imposing a rich sacramental theology upon the water rite alone is problematic.³ I hope to have shown that the fundamental change occurred chiefly in the context of the Gentile mission under the increasing influence of Hellenistic culture. Paul's mission was first and foremost for the Gentiles whose purpose was to spread the very message of Christ into their world. Introducing the Christian message, which might best be understood as the mystery of the "crucified Christ," Palestinian Christianity underwent substantial changes.

Paul described baptism as a dying with Christ in order to be raised with him (Rom. 6:3-5). This resurrection is not only a future event, but is experienced in the present through participation in the body of Christ. To be united with other worshipers in the fellowship of Christ is to have eternal life, for Jesus himself is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). That baptism marks the entrance into this life was so important in the New Testament community that Paul understood it as a symbol of the unity of the church, for which there is "one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:4-5). Baptism was equally important to (the author of) Peter, who viewed it as an action that saved the believer "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 3:21).

³ See James Dunn's *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press, 1970). Dunn pays attention to the fact that the New Testament speaks not only of baptizing in water but also in the Holy Spirit since in some points in New Testament the outpouring of the Spirit is an event clearly distinct and separate from water baptism.

Christian baptism is not merely about being immersed, making a commitment, or joining a particular denomination or church. None of these things convey the real meaning of Christian baptism. Christian Baptism is about publicly identifying with Christ. It is an act of obedience and commitment to follow Jesus, ὁ ἀρχηγός καὶ τελειωτής of our faith (Heb 12:2). Christian baptism is an outward expression of an inward decision to align oneself with Christ who lived and died for others. Yet, baptism is not merely an identifying with Christ nor merely a sign that the salvific benefits of Christ's death are applied to each Christian. Baptism into Christ, says Paul, is an inclusion into the events of Christ's death and resurrection, so that "we can walk in newness of life" (ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν, Rom. 6:4). When Paul interprets baptism as an initiation ritual, he intended to persuade the Gentiles that initiating new members into the Church meant that they must become full participants in Christian salvation, in the crucifixion and resurrection of the redeemer, Christ. Betz defines Christian initiation as "the beginning of a believer's transformation."⁴ Baptism, in this sense, marks a radical transition, a completely new way of living that is focused on God instead of oneself.

Christian participation in Christ as a continuing transformation is characterized by the real union of believer and Lord through the Spirit. The Church is characterized by communion with an image of Trinitarian unity, which consists of the mystery of the Church. In the recent ecumenical communion ecclesiology, the notion of *koinonia* plays

⁴ Betz, "Transferring a Ritual," 116.

a crucial role in discussion of the relationship between baptism and ecclesial unity, because it functions as a synthetic and comprehensive role, and because the category of communion allows for various kinds of unity among the various ecclesial traditions. From an ecumenical perspective, the death and resurrection in baptism commits the baptized to a life following Jesus. Christian life involves undertaking the ministry of service to people and creation as stewards of God's grace in Christ. The unity of the Christians is emphasized by Paul in connection with statements of baptism: "All are one in Christ" (Gal 3:28). This means that the rites of initiation are signs of unity, because one baptism incorporates those baptized into the one Lord. The communion ecclesiology that is based upon the baptismal theology enables Christians to overcome the existing divisions of the Church, and of the world.

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